Herbert K. Hess,
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Charles I insulted by the Mob.

THE ROMANCES OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

TWENTY YEARS AFTER

Volume Three

The D'Artagnan Romances

McKINLAY, STONE & MACKENZIE
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CHAPTER XIX.

D'ARTAGNAN FINDS A PLAN.

Athos knew D'Artagnan better perhaps than the latter knew himself. He knew that in an adventurous spirit like that of the Gascon the main thing is to let fall a thought, as the letting a seed fall into a rich, vigorous soil is the only thing needed.

He had then quietly left his friend to shrug his shoulders, and continued his way, talking to him of Raoul; a topic which he had under other circumstances allowed to drop, as we remember.

At nightfall they reached Thirsk. The four friends seemed completely indifferent to the precautionary measures for the custody of the king. They withdrew to a private house; and as they had from moment to moment cause to fear for themselves, they established themselves in one room, arranging a means of egress in case of attack. The servants were assigned to different posts. Grimaud slept on a truss of straw before the door.

D'Artagnan was thoughtful, and seemed to have lost for the time his usual loquacity. He did not say a word; he kept incessantly whistling, going from his bed to the window. Porthos, who never saw anything except external things, talked as usual. D'Artagnan replied in monosyllables. Athos and Aramis looked at each other smiling.

The day had been fatiguing; and yet, with the exception of Porthos, whose sleep was as unchangeable as his

appetite, the friends slept badly. The next morning D'Artagnan was the first up. He had gone to the stables, had seen to the horses, and had already given the necessary orders before Athos and Aramis were up, and while Porthos was still snoring.

At eight the march began in the same order as the evening before; only D'Artagnan allowed his friends to make the journey together, while he went to renew his acquaintance with Mr. Groslow. The latter, whose heart had been won by the praises bestowed on him, received D'Artagnan with a gracious smile.

"In truth, Monsieur," D'Artagnan said to him, "I am pleased to find some one with whom to converse in my poor language. M. du Vallon, my friend, is of so melancholy a disposition that one can only draw from him four words a day; as for our two prisoners, you can easily understand that they are not in a mood for much conversation."

"They are desperate Royalists," said Groslow.

"The more reason why they should be angry with us for having taken the Stuart, whom, I greatly hope, you are going to bring to trial."

"Of course," said Groslow; "we are taking him to London for that very purpose."

"And you don't mean to lose him out of your sight, I expect?"

"Hang it! I should think not! You see," added the officer, laughing, "he has a truly royal escort."

"Yes, there is no danger of his escaping you during the day; but at night —"

"The precautions are doubled."

"And what kind of surveillance do you make use of?"

"Eight men remain constantly in his room."

"The devil! he is well guarded, then. But besides

these men, you doubtless place a guard outside? One cannot use too many precautions with such a prisoner."

"Oh, no. Just think! what could two men without arms do against eight armed men?"

"How do you mean *two* men?"

"Why, the king and his valet."

"His valet has permission, then, to be always with him?"

"Yes, Stuart has asked this favor, and Colonel Harrison yielded it. Under the pretext of being king, he cannot dress or undress himself."

"In truth, Captain," said D'Artagnan, to continue this system of laudation, which had so far succeeded so well, "the more I listen the more I am astonished at the easy, elegant manner with which you speak French. You have lived in Paris three years, that 's well; but I should live in London all my life, and should not arrive, I am sure, at the point where you are. What did you do then at Paris?"

"My father, who is in trade, placed me with his correspondent, who in return sent his son to my father; it is the custom among merchants to make such exchanges."

"And did Paris please you, Monsieur?"

"Yes. But you have great need of a revolution like ours; not against your king, who is but a child, but against that stingy Italian, who is your queen's lover."

"Ah, I am of your opinion, Monsieur; and that this would be soon done, if we only had a dozen officers like you, without prejudices, vigilant, intractable. Ah! we would soon come to the end of Mazarin's reign, and we would bring a fine prosecution against him, like that you are going to bring against your king."

"But," said the officer, "I thought you were in his service, and that it was he who sent you as envoy to General Cromwell?"

"That is to say, I am in the king's service, and knowing that he was going to send some one to England, I asked for the mission, so great was my desire to know the man of genius who at this moment rules the three kingdoms. So when he proposed to M. du Vallon and myself that we should draw our swords in honor of Old England, you have seen how we jumped at the proposal."

"Yes; I know that you charged by the side of M. Mordaunt."

"At his right and left, Monsieur. Hang it! what a brave young man he is! How he settled matters with Monsieur his uncle! Did you see that?"

"Do you know him?"

"Well, I can even say that we are very intimate; M. du Vallon and myself came with him from France."

"It seems that you kept him waiting a long while at Boulogne."

"How could it be helped? I was like you, — I had a king to guard."

"Ah, ah!" said Groslow; "what king?"

"Ours, of course! the little king, — Louis XIV.;" and D'Artagnan took off his hat. The Englishman did so also from politeness.

"And how long did you guard him?"

"Three nights; and upon my word I shall always recall them with pleasure."

"Is the young king very amiable?"

"The king! he was sleeping soundly."

"But then what do you mean?"

"I mean that my friends the officers of the Guards and of the Musketeers came to keep me company, and that we passed the nights in drink and play."

"Ah, yes!" said the Englishman, with a sigh, "that 's true; you Frenchmen are jolly companions."

"Do not you play in this way when on guard?"

"Never!" said the Englishman.

"In that case you must become very wearied; and I pity you."

"The fact is that I see my turn come with a certain dread, — to watch a whole night is very tedious."

"Yes, when one watches alone, or with stupid soldiers; but when one watches with a gay partner, and rolls the gold and the dice on a table, the night goes like a dream. Do you like games at cards, — *lansquenet*, for example?"

"I am absurdly fond of it; I used to play at it nearly every evening in France."

"And since you have been in England?"

"I have not touched a dice-box nor a card."

"I pity you," said D'Artagnan, with a look of deep compassion.

"Listen; do this," said the Englishman.

"What?"

"To-morrow I am on guard."

"Over the Stuart?"

"Yes; come and pass the night with me."

"Impossible."

"Impossible?"

"Altogether impossible."

"How is that?"

"Every night I play with M. du Vallon. Sometimes we do not go to bed. This morning, for example, we were still playing at daylight."

"Well?"

"Well, he would get low-spirited if I did not play with him."

"Is he a good player?"

"I have seen him lose up to two thousand pistoles, while laughing enough to crack his sides."

"Bring him, then."

"How do you mean? How about the prisoners?"

"Ah, the devil! that's true. Make your servants guard them."

"Yes, for them to escape!" said D'Artagnan. "I have no guard."

"These, then, are men of good standing, since you hold them so fast?"

"Rather! One is a rich lord of Touraine; the other is a Knight of Malta of high family. We have treated for their ransom; each to pay two thousand pounds sterling on reaching France. We do not wish, then, to leave a single moment these men whom our lackeys know to be millionnaires. We have stripped them a little on capturing them; and I will even confess to you that it is their purse that M. du Vallon and I are drawing on every night. But they may have concealed from us some precious stone, some diamond of value; so we are like misers who do not leave their treasures. We have constituted ourselves permanent guardians of our men; and when I sleep, M. du Vallon watches."

"Ah, ah!" said Groslow.

"You see now what compels me to refuse your polite offer, for which I am all the more thankful because nothing is more wearisome than always playing with the same person; chances keep so equal that at the end of a month one finds he has neither gained nor lost."

"Ah!" said Groslow, with a sigh, "there is something still more wearisome, and that is not playing at all."

"I understand that."

"But come," resumed the Englishman, "are these men dangerous?"

"In what respect?"

"Are they likely to attempt making their escape?"

D'Artagnan burst out laughing.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, "a sort of fever makes one of them tremble, as he is not able to get used to your charming country; the other is a Knight of Malta, as timid as a girl, and for greater security we have taken from them even their knives and pocket scissors."

"Well," said Groslow; "bring them."

"What! Do you wish it?"

"Yes, I have eight men. Four will guard them, and four the king."

"In fact, then, the matter can be settled in that way, although I am giving you a good deal of trouble."

"Bah! come all the same; you shall see how I will arrange."

"Oh, I am not disturbing myself about it," said D'Artagnan; "to a man like you I would give myself up blindfolded."

This last bit of flattery drew from the officer one of those chuckling laughs of satisfaction which make friends of those who called them forth, for they are an outcome of tickled vanity.

"But," said D'Artagnan, "now I think of it, what prevents us from beginning to-night?"

"What?"

"Our game."

"Nothing in the world," said Groslow.

"Well, then, come this evening to us; and to-morrow we will return the visit. If anything in our men disquiets you, they being, as you know, very disconsolate Royalists, well, no harm will have been done, and it will be simply a night well passed."

"Capital! This evening at your quarters, to-morrow at Stuart's, the day after at mine."

"And the other days in London. Ah!" said D'Ar-

tagnan, "you see plainly that one can lead a jolly life everywhere."

"Yes, when one falls in with Frenchmen, and Frenchmen like you."

"And like M. du Vallon; what a merry soul you will find him! — a desperate Frondeur, a man who nearly killed Mazarin between two gates. He is employed because they fear him."

"Yes, he has a fine figure; and without knowing him, he pleases me entirely."

"It will be another thing when you know him. Eh! hold; there he is calling me! Pardon, we are so intimate that he cannot do without me. You excuse me?"

"How, then?"

"Till this evening."

"At your quarters."

"At our quarters."

The two men exchanged salutes, and D'Artagnan returned to his companions.

"What had you to say to that bull-dog?" said Porthos.

"My dear friend, don't speak so ill of M. Groslow; he is one of my most intimate friends."

"One of your friends!" said Porthos, "this slayer of peasants!"

"*Chut!* my dear Porthos. Well, yes, M. Groslow is a little passionate, it 's true; but at bottom I have discovered in him two good qualities, — he is a fool, and proud."

Porthos opened his great eyes wide with astonishment; Athos and Aramis looked at each other with a smile. They knew that D'Artagnan did nothing without an end in view.

"But," continued D'Artagnan, "you will appreciate him for yourself."

"How so?"

"He is coming this evening to play cards with us."

"Oh, oh!" said Porthos, whose eyes brightened up at that; "and is he rich?"

"He is the son of one of the greatest merchants in London."

"And can he play at *lansquenet?*

"He adores it."

"At *basset* and *biribi?*"

"He is mad over them."

"Good!" said Porthos; "we shall pass a pleasant night."

"The more pleasant because it promises us a better one to come."

"How so?"

"Yes, he is to play this evening with us; to-morrow we are to play with him."

"Where will that be?"

"I will tell you by-and-by. Now we must think of one thing only,—how to receive worthily the honor which M. Groslow does us. We halt this evening at Derby; let Mousqueton get the start of us, and if there is a bottle of wine to be had there, let him buy it. There will be no great harm if he prepares a little supper, in which you will not take part, because, Athos, you have the fever, and because you, Aramis, are a Knight of Malta, and the wild talk of soldiers like us displeases you and makes you blush. Do you understand this well?"

"Yes," said Porthos; "but the devil take me if I can make it out."

"Porthos, my friend, you know that I am descended from the prophets on my father's side, and from the sibyls on my mother's, so that I speak in parables and riddles; let those who have ears listen, and let those who have eyes look. I cannot say more at present."

"Do not," said Athos; "I am sure that what you do is well done."

"And you, Aramis, are you of the same opinion?"

"Entirely, my dear D'Artagnan."

"Already," said D'Artagnan, "I have true believers; and it is a pleasure to work miracles for them. They are not like this unbeliever Porthos, who always wants to see and touch before believing."

"The fact is," said Porthos, with a shrewd look, "I am very incredulous."

D'Artagnan gave him a slap on the shoulder, and as they reached then the place for breakfast, the conversation stopped.

Towards five in the afternoon, as had been agreed, they sent Mousqueton on in advance. He could not speak English, but he had noticed that Grimaud, by his practice of signs, had quite replaced conversation by means of them. He had therefore set himself to study gestures with Grimaud, and in a few lessons, thanks to the superiority of the master, he had arrived at a certain degree of success. Blaisois went with him.

The four friends, when passing along the High Street of Derby, saw Blaisois standing at the door of a fine-looking house; there the preparations had been made.

During the whole day they had not approached the king for fear of causing suspicion, and instead of dining at Colonel Harrison's table, as they had done the previous evening, they dined by themselves.

At the appointed hour Groslow came. D'Artagnan received him as if he had been a friend of twenty years' standing. Porthos measured him from head to foot, and smiled on observing that notwithstanding the remarkable blow which Groslow had given Parry's brother, he himself was superior to Groslow in strength. Athos and

Aramis did what they could to hide the disgust with which this brutal nature inspired them. In short, Groslow seemed satisfied with his reception.

Athos and Aramis played their parts. At midnight they retired into their chamber, the door of which they left open under pretence of good-will. Besides, D'Artagnan accompanied them, leaving Porthos playing with Groslow.

Porthos gained fifty pistoles from Groslow, and found, when the latter had retired, that he was a more agreeable companion than he had at first thought him. As for Groslow, he promised to himself to repair next day the check he had received from Porthos; and he left the Gascon, reminding him of the meeting in the evening. We say the evening, for the players did not leave till four in the morning.

The day passed as usual; D'Artagnan went from Captain Groslow to Colonel Harrison, and from the latter to his friends. To any one who did not know D'Artagnan, he seemed to be in his ordinary condition, but to his friends, Athos and Aramis, his gayety was feverish.

"What can he be plotting?" said Aramis.

"Let us wait," said Athos.

Porthos said nothing; he only counted in his pocket, one after the other, with an air of satisfaction which betrayed itself in his face, the fifty pistoles he had won from Groslow.

On reaching Ryston in the evening, D'Artagnan assembled his friends. His face had lost that look of careless gayety which he had worn as a mask the whole day. Athos pressed Aramis's hand.

"The time is drawing near?" he said.

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, who had overheard the remark, — "yes, the time approaches; to-night, Messieurs, we shall save the king."

Athos trembled; his eyes flamed up.

"D'Artagnan," said he, doubting after having hoped, "this is not a mere joke, is it? It would do me much harm."

"You are a strange fellow, Athos, to doubt me thus. When and where have you seen me jesting with a friend's affection and a king's life? I have told you, and I repeat it, that this night we shall save Charles I. You have relied on me to find a way; the way is found."

Porthos looked at D'Artagnan with a feeling of deep admiration; Aramis smiled as one who hopes; Athos was pale as death, and trembled all over.

"Speak," said Athos.

Porthos opened his great eyes. Aramis hung, so to speak, upon the lips of D'Artagnan.

"We are invited to pass the night with M. Groslow, you know."

"Yes," replied Porthos, "he made us promise him to let him have his revenge."

"Well, he will do so in the king's apartments."

"Where the king will be?" exclaimed Athos.

"Yes, Messieurs. M. Groslow is the guard of his Majesty this evening; and to amuse him during his duty, he invites us to keep him company."

"All four?" asked Athos.

"Yes, certainly; all four. Can we leave our prisoners?"

"Ah, ah!" ejaculated Aramis.

"Let us see," said Athos, panting.

"You are going then to Groslow; we with our swords, you with poniards. We will overmaster those eight fools and their stupid commander. M. Porthos, what do you say about it?"

"I say that it 's easily done."

"We will dress up the king in Groslow's clothes;

Mousqueton, Grimaud, and Blaisois will have our horses ready saddled round the first street; we will mount, and before day we shall be twenty leagues from here. Ay! will this plot do, Athos?"

Athos put his hands on D'Artagnan's shoulders, and looked at him with his calm, soft smile.

"I declare, my friend, that you have no equal under heaven for nobleness and courage; while we were thinking you indifferent to our griefs, you alone found what we were vainly seeking. I repeat it, then, D'Artagnan, you are the best of us all; and I bless and love you, my dear son."

"The idea that I should not find that out!" said Porthos, striking himself on the forehead, "it is so simple."

"But," said Aramis, "if I understand rightly, we must kill them all; is it not so?"

Athos shuddered, and became very pale.

"Confound it!" said D'Artagnan, "it really will be necessary. I have tried for a long while to find a way to avoid this, but I confess I have not been able."

"Come," said Aramis, "it is not a question of hesitating about the situation. How are we to proceed?"

"I have a double plan," replied D'Artagnan.

"Let us hear the first," said Aramis.

"If we are all four together, at my signal, which shall be the words, *at last*, you two will each stab the man nearest you, while we will do the same on our side. Here, then, will be four dead; we shall be then equal-sided, four against their five. These will surrender and be gagged, or if they resist, we will kill them; but should our entertainer change his opinion and receive only Porthos and me, *dame!* we must resort to grand measures and strike double. It will be longer and hotter work, but you will

keep outside with your swords, and hasten in on hearing the din."

"But what if they hit you?" said Athos.

"Impossible! these beer-drinkers are too heavy and clumsy; besides, you will strike at the throat, Porthos. That kills as quickly, and prevents those we kill from crying out."

"Very well!" said Porthos, "it will be a pretty little cutting of throats."

"Frightful, frightful!" said Athos.

"Bah, Monsieur! you are sensitive; you would strike many more in a battle. Besides, friend, if you think the king's life not worth the cost, we will say no more about it, and I will inform M. Groslow that I am ill."

"No," said Athos, "I am wrong, my friend; pardon me."

At that moment the door opened, and a soldier appeared.

"M. le Capitaine Groslow," said he, in bad French, "begs to send word to M. d'Artagnan and M. du Vallon that he is expecting them."

"Where?" asked D'Artagnan.

"In the room of the English Nebuchadnezzar," replied the soldier, a thorough-going Puritan.

"Very well," said Athos, in excellent English, who colored deeply at the insult to his royal Majesty; "tell Captain Groslow that we are coming there."

Then the Puritan went off. The servants were ordered to saddle eight horses, and go and wait without dismounting or separating at the corner of a street scarcely twenty yards from the house in which the king was staying.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PARTY AT LANSQUENET.

It was nine at night; the posts had been changed at eight, and Captain Groslow's turn of duty had lasted an hour. D'Artagnan and Porthos, armed with swords, Aramis and Athos, each with a poniard hidden in his breast, went towards the house which for that evening served as Charles Stuart's prison. The two latter followed D'Artagnan and Porthos, in appearance humble and disarmed, like captives.

"Upon my word," said Groslow, when he saw them, "I had almost given you up."

D'Artagnan approached him, and said in a whisper, "In fact, we did hesitate a little, M. du Vallon and myself."

"And why so?"

D'Artagnan gave a glance towards Athos and Aramis.

"Ah, ah!" said Groslow, "on account of their opinions? It matters little. On the contrary," he added, smiling, "if they want to see their Stuart, they will be able."

"Do we pass the night in the king's room?" asked D'Artagnan.

"No, but in the room adjoining; and as the door will remain open, it is quite the same as if we were in the room itself. Have you brought a good supply of money? I declare I intend to play a deep game this evening."

"Do you hear?" said D'Artagnan, chinking the gold in his pockets.

"Very good!" said Groslow, and he opened the door.

"I do it to show you the way, Messieurs," he said, and went in first.

D'Artagnan turned towards his friends. Porthos was as indifferent as if it were only an ordinary game; Athos was pale but resolute; Aramis wiped with his handkerchief his forehead, which was moistened with a slight perspiration.

The eight guards were at their posts. Four were in the king's chamber, two at the door of communication, two at the door by which the four friends entered. At the sight of their naked swords, Athos smiled; it was then to be not a butchery, but a combat. From this moment all his good-humor appeared to return. Charles, who could be seen through the open door, was on his bed, dressed; only a plaid was thrown over him. At his bolster Parry was seated, reading in a low voice, yet so that Charles could hear, a chapter out of a Catholic Bible.

A coarse tallow candle, placed on a black table, lighted up the resigned face of the king and the far less calm face of his faithful servant.

From time to time Parry stopped, thinking the king to be really asleep; but then the king would open his eyes again, and say to him with a smile, "Go on, my good Parry, I am listening."

Groslow went to the entrance of the king's room, purposely putting on his hat again, which he had held in his hand to receive his guests; looked for a moment with contempt at this simple, touching picture of an old servant reading the Bible to his king, a prisoner; ascertained that every man was at the post assigned him, and turning towards D'Artagnan, he looked with triumph at the Frenchman, as if asking for praise for his tactics.

"Wondrous!" said the Gascon; "you would make a distinguished general."

"Do you believe," asked Groslow, "that the Stuart will escape while I am guarding him?"

"No, truly," replied D'Artagnan; "unless at least friends should rain down to him from heaven."

Groslow's countenance beamed with pleasure.

As Charles Stuart had all this time kept his eyes closed, one could hardly say whether or not he noticed the insolent remark of the Puritan captain. But he could not help, when he heard the accentuated tones of D'Artagnan's voice, re-opening his eyes. Parry started, and broke off the reading.

"What are you considering that makes you leave off?" said the king. "Go on, my good Parry, unless you are fatigued."

"No, Sire," and he resumed his reading.

A table was ready in the first room, covered with a cloth, and on it were two lighted candles, some cards, two dice-boxes, and some dice.

"Messieurs," said Groslow, "be seated, I pray you; I, facing the Stuart, whom I like so much to see, especially where he is; you, M. d'Artagnan, in front of me."

Athos colored with anger; D'Artagnan looked at him frowning.

"That is it," said D'Artagnan; "you, M. le Comte de la Fère, at the right of M. Groslow; you, M. le Chevalier d'Herblay, at his left; you, Vallon, near me. You back me; and these Messieurs back M. Groslow."

Thus placed, D'Artagnan talked with Porthos by touching his knee; since Aramis and Athos were in front of him, he was able to communicate with them by look.

At the names of the Comte de la Fère and of the Chevalier d'Herblay, Charles opened his eyes, and in spite of

himself, raising his head, took in at a glance all the actors of this scene.

At this moment Parry turned over some pages of his Bible and read aloud this verse of Jeremiah: "God said, Listen to the words of my prophets, my servants, whom I have sent you with great care, and whom I have led towards you."

The four friends exchanged looks. The words that Parry had just spoken indicated to them that their presence was attributed by the king to its true motive. The eyes of D'Artagnan sparkled with joy.

"You asked me just now if I was in funds?" said D'Artagnan, putting a number of pistoles on the table.

"Yes," said Groslow.

"Well," resumed D'Artagnan, "it 's my turn to say to you, keep good hold of your treasure, my dear M. Groslow, for we shall not leave here till we have carried it off."

"That will not be for want of defence on my part," said Groslow.

"So much the better," said D'Artagnan. "To the fight! You know or you do not know that that is what we want."

"Oh yes, I know well enough," said Groslow, with a coarse laugh, "you seek only wounds and bruises, or all sorts of mischief, you French."

Charles had heard and understood all. A slight color came into his cheeks. The soldiers on guard saw him little by little stretch his weary limbs, and under the pretence of the excessive heat produced by a red-hot stove, throw back the Scotch plaid by which he was covered. Athos and Aramis felt pleased at seeing that the king was lying on the bed dressed.

The play began. This evening fortune was in favor of Groslow. A hundred pistoles passed from one side of the

table to the other. Groslow seemed to be in the highest glee.

Porthos, who had lost the fifty pistoles he had won the night before, and besides, thirty pistoles of his own, was very sullen, and questioned D'Artagnan with his knee, as if to ask him if it was not soon time to pass to another kind of game; on their side, Athos and Aramis looked at him from time to time with a scrutinizing eye, but D'Artagnan remained impassive.

Ten o'clock struck. They heard the patrol going its rounds.

"How often do you make the rounds?" asked D'Artagnan, drawing forth fresh pistoles from his pocket.

"Every two hours," said Groslow.

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "it is prudent." And in his turn he threw a glance of his eye at Athos and at Aramis.

They heard the patrol's steps receding in the distance. D'Artagnan touched Porthos's knee.

Meanwhile, attracted by the play, so powerful with all men, the soldiers, whose orders were to remain in the king's room, had by degrees come close, and standing on tiptoe, looked over the shoulders of D'Artagnan and Porthos; those at the door drew near also, in this way furthering the desires of the four friends, who preferred to have them near at hand rather than to be forced to run after them to the four corners of the room. The two sentinels at the door had always their naked swords, only they leaned upon their points and looked at the players. Athos seemed to grow calm as the moment approached; his two white and aristocratic hands played with the louis, which he bent and straightened back with the same ease as if the gold had been pewter. Less master of himself, Aramis fumbled continually in his bosom; Porthos, impatient at losing always, kept his knee in constant motion.

D'Artagnan turned round, looking mechanically behind him, and between two soldiers saw Parry standing up and Charles leaning on his elbow, with his hands joined as if in earnest prayer. D'Artagnan felt sure that the moment had come. He cast a preparatory look at Aramis and Athos; they both pushed back their chairs lightly so as to get freedom of movement.

D'Artagnan gave a tap on Porthos's knee; and the latter rose as if for the purpose of stretching his legs, only he took care while rising to feel certain that he could draw his sword readily.

"Hang it all!" said D'Artagnan, "another twenty pistoles lost! Really, Captain Groslow, you have too much luck; it can't last," and he took twenty more pistoles from his pocket.

"The last throw, Captain. These twenty pistoles on it."

And Groslow turned up two cards, as is customary, — a king for D'Artagnan, an ace for himself.

"A king!" said D'Artagnan, "that looks well. M. Groslow," he added, "take care of the king!"

And in spite of his self-control there was in D'Artagnan's voice a strange vibration which made his partner start. Groslow began turning up the cards one after another. If he turned up an ace first, he won, but if a king, he lost.

He turned up a king.

"At last," said D'Artagnan.

At these words Athos and Aramis got up; Porthos drew back a step.

Poniards and swords were going to glitter, when suddenly the door opened and Harrison appeared at the threshold, accompanied by a man wrapped up in a cloak. Behind him they saw the muskets of five or six soldiers glittering.

Groslow rose quickly, ashamed at being surprised in the midst of wine, cards, and dice. But Harrison paid no attention to him, and entering the room of the king, followed by his companion, "Charles Stuart," said he, "the order has come to conduct you to London without stopping day or night. Make ready to start this very moment."

"And in whose name is this order given?" asked the king; "by General Oliver Cromwell?"

"Yes," said Harrison; "and this is M. Mordaunt who has just brought it, and who is charged with its execution."

"Mordaunt!" muttered the four friends, exchanging looks.

D'Artagnan swept off the table all the money that he and Porthos had lost, and stuffed it into his capacious pocket. Athos and Aramis placed themselves behind him. At this movement Mordaunt turned round, recognized them, and uttered an exclamation of savage joy.

"I believe we are caught," said D'Artagnan, in a whisper to his friends.

"Not yet," said Porthos.

"Colonel, colonel," said Mordaunt, "have this room surrounded! You are betrayed! These four Frenchmen escaped from Newcastle, and want without doubt to carry off the king. Have them arrested."

"Oh, young man," said D'Artagnan, drawing his sword, "that 's an order more easily given than executed." Then whirling his sword round, "Retreat, friends," cried he, "retreat!"

At the same time he sprang towards the door, and overthrew two of the soldiers who guarded it, before they had time to cock their muskets. Athos and Aramis followed him, Porthos made the rear-guard; and before soldiers,

officers, or colonel had had time to know where they were, they were all four in the street.

"Fire on them!" cried Mordaunt.

Two or three musket-shots were actually fired, but had no other effect than that of showing the four fugitives turning the corner of the street safe and sound.

The horses were at the appointed place; the servants had only to throw the bridles to their masters, who sprang into the saddle with the activity of finished cavaliers.

"Forward!" said D'Artagnan, "the spur!"

They took the route by which they had come; that is to say, towards Scotland. They left the town without difficulty, as it had neither gates nor walls. At fifty paces from the last house, D'Artagnan stopped.

"Halt!" he said.

"How halt?" exclaimed Porthos, "at full speed you mean?"

"Not at all," replied D'Artagnan; "this time we shall be pursued. Let us take the route to Scotland, and when we have seen them pass, let us then go in the opposite direction."

A few yards off was a stream, over which was a bridge. D'Artagnan led his horse under the arch; his friends followed him. They had not been there ten minutes when they heard the quick gallop of a troop of horsemen. A few minutes after, these horsemen passed over their heads, far from suspecting that those they sought were only separated from them by the thickness of the arch of the bridge.

CHAPTER XXI.

LONDON.

When the tramp of the horses was lost in the distance, D'Artagnan regained the bank of the stream, and began to cross the plain, directing his course as much as possible in the direction of London. His three friends followed him in silence, until by a large semi-circle they had left the city far behind them.

"This time," said D'Artagnan, when he thought himself sufficiently far from danger to go at a less rapid pace, "I think that all is lost, and that the best thing to be done is to get back to France. What do you say about this, Athos? Do you not find it reasonable?"

"Yes, dear friend," replied Athos; "but the other day you uttered a saying more than reasonable, — a saying noble and generous. You said, 'Let us die here!' I would recall your saying."

"Oh!" said Porthos, "death is nothing. Death ought not to disquiet us, since we don't know what it is; but it is the idea of a defeat which torments me. In the fashion things are turning out, I see that we shall be obliged to give battle to London, to the Provinces, and to all England; and truly we cannot in the end fail to be beaten."

"I think we ought to see the end of this great tragedy," said Athos. "Do you think as I do, Aramis?"

"On every point, my dear count, for I confess I should not be sorry to come across Mordaunt again. It seems to me we have an account to reckon with him, and it is not

our practice to leave countries without paying debts of this sort."

"Ah! that's another thing altogether," said D'Artagnan, "and seems to me a very plausible reason. In order to come upon Mordaunt again I confess I would wait a year in London if necessary. Only let us lodge with a safe man and one of a kind not to awaken suspicion, for at this moment M. Cromwell will cause us to be sought for; and as well as I can judge, he does not jest. Athos, do you know a decent inn where one can have clean sheets, roast beef properly cooked, and wine not made with hops nor gin?"

"I think I can manage it. Winter took us to a house kept by a Spaniard, who is now a naturalized subject, naturalized through the guineas of his new compatriots. What do you say to this, Aramis?"

"Why, this project of putting up at Señor Pérez's seems to be very reasonable. I adopt it then on my part. We will invoke the memory of that poor Winter, for whom he seemed to have a great veneration; we will tell him that we come as amateurs to see what is going on; we will expend with him, each of us, a guinea a day, and by means of all these precautions I think we can live there in security."

"You forget one thing, Aramis," said D'Artagnan, "and that a very important precaution."

"What is that?"

"Changing our dress."

"Bah!" said Porthos, "what need is there to do that? We are at ease in this dress."

"So as not to be recognized," said D'Artagnan. "Our clothes have a uniformity of cut and almost of color, which declares us to be Frenchmen at the first glance. Now, I do not hold enough to the cut of my doublet or to

the color of my breeches to risk, for love of these, being hanged at Tyburn or sent on a voyage to India. I am going to buy myself a maroon-colored suit. I have remarked that all those imbeciles of Puritans dote on this color."

"But will you find your man?" said Aramis.

"Oh, certainly," said Athos, "he lives in Green Hall Street, Bedford's Tavern; besides, I could go into the city with my eyes shut."

"I wish we were already there," said D'Artagnan; "and my advice is that we arrive in London before day, even if we kill our horses."

"Come on," said Athos, "for if I am not mistaken in my calculations, we cannot be more than eight or ten leagues from London now."

The friends pressed on, and actually reached London about five in the morning.

At the gate where they presented themselves, the guard stopped them; but Athos replied in excellent English that they were sent by Colonel Harrison to notify his colleague Pride of the early arrival of the king, and Athos gave such precise and positive details that if the officers had some suspicions they vanished completely. A passage was then opened for the four friends with all kinds of Puritan congratulations.

Athos had been right. He went directly to the Bedford Tavern, and was recognized by the landlord, who was so pleased to see him return with so many companions that he had his best rooms prepared for them at once. Although it was not yet day, our four travellers found the whole city in commotion. The report that the king under Colonel Harrison was on his way to London had spread since the evening; and many had not gone to bed for fear lest the Stuart, as they called him, should arrive in the night, and they should miss seeing him enter.

The project of changing their dress had been unanimously adopted, and the landlord went out to make the purchases. Athos selected a black dress, which made him look like an honest citizen; Aramis, who did not wish to be without his sword, chose a dark dress of military cut; Porthos was attracted by a red doublet and green breeches; D'Artagnan, who had already chosen the color, was only concerned about the shade, and in the maroon dress which he selected looked exactly like a retired sugar merchant.

Grimaud and Mousqueton, not being in livery, were sufficiently disguised. Grimaud offered the calm, dry, and stiff type of the circumspect Englishman, Mousqueton that of the corpulent, lounging Englishman.

"Now," said D'Artagnan, "let us come to the chief thing; let us cut our hair, so as not to be insulted by the populace. Since we can no longer be distinguished as gentlemen by carrying a sword, let us appear to be Puritans by the arrangement of our hair. That is, you know, the important distinction between the Covenanter and Cavalier."

On this important point D'Artagnan found Aramis obstinate. He wanted to keep his long hair, on which he bestowed much care; and it was necessary that Athos, to whom all these matters were quite indifferent, should set him the example. Porthos made no objections to giving his head in charge to Mousqueton, who cut off scissors-ful of his thick hair. D'Artagnan cut his into a fanciful form, not much unlike a medal of the time of Francis I. or Charles IX.

"We are frightful," said Athos.

"And it seems to me that we smell enough of the Puritan to make one shudder," said Aramis.

"I have a cold in the head," said Porthos.

"And I feel a strong desire to preach a sermon," said D'Artagnan.

"Now," said Athos, "since we do not even know one another, and have consequently no fear of others knowing us, let us go and see the king come into London; if he has marched all night, he cannot be far off."

The friends had not been in the crowds more than two hours before great shouts and commotion announced Charles's arrival. They had sent a coach on before; and from a distance the gigantic Porthos, who was taller by a head than most other men, announced the approach of the royal coach. D'Artagnan stood on tiptoe, while Athos and Aramis listened for the purpose of satisfying themselves of the public opinion. The coach passed, and D'Artagnan recognized Harrison at one door and Mordaunt at the other. The populace, whose feelings Athos and Aramis were studying, hurled many imprecations at Charles.

Athos returned in despair.

"My dear fellow," said D'Artagnan to him, "you persist uselessly, and I protest that the situation is bad. For myself, I only attach myself to it on your account and from a certain artistic interest in politics *à la mousquetaire*. I think that it would be very pleasant to snatch their prey from all these howlers and laugh at them. I will think of it."

The next day, on going to the window, which looked out upon the most crowded parts of the city, Athos heard the Act of Parliament which arraigned the ex-king Charles I. publicly cried. D'Artagnan was close to him; Aramis was consulting a map; Porthos was absorbed in the last delicacies of a wholesome breakfast.

"The Parliament!" exclaimed Athos, "the Parliament cannot possibly have passed such a bill."

"Listen," said D'Artagnan, "I understand English but

little, yet as English is only French badly pronounced, here is what I understand : *Parliament's bill*, which means bill of Parliament, or God damn me ! as they say here."

Just then the host entered ; Athos called to him.

"Parliament has passed this bill ? " Athos asked him in English.

"Yes, my Lord, — the purified Parliament."

"How so ? are there then two Parliaments ? "

"My friend," D'Artagnan interposed, "as I don't understand English, but we all understand Spanish, do me the pleasure of conversing in that language, which is your own, and which consequently you ought to be pleased to speak when you find the occasion."

"Ah, excellent ! " said Aramis.

As to Porthos, as we have said, all his attention was concentrated upon the bone of a cutlet which he was engaged in stripping of its fleshy envelope.

"What do you want to know ? " said the host, in Spanish.

"I was asking," said Athos, "if there are two Parliaments, — one purified and the other not ? "

"Oh, how funny it is ! " said Porthos, raising his head slowly, and looking at his friends with astonishment ; "I comprehend English now ? I understand what you say."

"It 's because we are speaking Spanish, dear friend," said Athos, with his usual unconcern.

"Ah, *diable !* " said Porthos, "I am provoked at it ; that would have made for me another language."

"When I call the Parliament purified, Señor," resumed the host, "I speak of that which M. le Colonel Pride has purged."

"Ah ! " said D'Artagnan, "these folks are truly very ingenious. I must, when I return to France, make a present of this method to M. de Mazarin and to Monsieur

the Coadjutor. The one will purify in the name of the court, the other in the people's name, so that there will be no longer any Parliament at all."

"Who is this Colonel Pride?" asked Aramis, "and what plan did he adopt for purifying the Parliament?"

"Colonel Pride," said the Spaniard, "was formerly a carter, a man of much wit, who had noticed that when a stone is met with on the road, it is much easier to lift up the stone than to make the wheel pass over it. Now out of the two hundred and fifty-one members of Parliament, there were one hundred and ninety-one who embarrassed it, and who would have upset his political cart. He took them up as he used to do the stones, and threw them out of the House."

"Capital!" said D'Artagnan, who, being especially a man of wit, valued mental vigor wherever he fell in with it.

"And all those expelled were for Stuart?" asked Athos.

"Without any doubt, Señor; and you understand that they would have saved the king."

"*Parbleu!*" said Porthos, majestically, "they formed the majority."

"And you think," said Aramis, "that he will consent to appear before such a tribunal?"

"He can't help himself; if he tried a refusal, the people would constrain him."

"Thanks, M. Pérez," said Athos; "now I am sufficiently informed."

"Do you begin at last to believe that it is a lost cause, Athos?" said D'Artagnan; "and that with the Harrisons, the Joyces, the Prides, and the Cromwells, we shall never be equal to the task?"

"The king will be delivered to the tribunal," said Athos; "the silence even of his partisans indicates a conspiracy."

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders.

"But," said Aramis, "if they dare to condemn their king, it will be to exile or prison, that 's all."

D'Artagnan whistled as if he felt incredulous.

"We shall see," said Athos, "for we shall go to the sittings, I expect."

"You will not have long to wait, for they begin to-morrow," said the host.

"Oh, then," replied Athos, "the proceedings were all arranged before the king was taken?"

"No doubt," said D'Artagnan; "they were begun on the day he was bought."

"You know," said Aramis, "that it was our friend Mordaunt who made, if not the bargain, at least the first overtures in this small matter."

"You know," said D'Artagnan, "that wherever he falls into my hands I will kill that M. Mordaunt."

"Fie, now!" said Athos; "such a wretch!"

"But it is just because he is such a wretch that I will kill him. Ah! dear friend, I do your will often enough for you to be indulgent of mine. Besides, this time, whether it pleases you or not, I declare that this Mordaunt shall be killed only by me."

"And by me," said Porthos.

"And by me," said Aramis.

"What touching unanimity!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "which so well agrees with our character of good citizens. Let us take a turn about town. Mordaunt himself would not know us four paces off in this fog. Let us go and imbibe a little fog."

"Yes," said Porthos, "that will be a change for us from beer."

And the four friends actually went out to take, as the common saying is, the air of the place.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TRIAL.

NEXT day a numerous guard conducted Charles I. before the High Court instituted to try him. The crowd filled the streets and houses adjoining the palace.

So at the first steps taken by the four friends they were stopped by the almost insurmountable obstacle of this living wall; some of the populace, robust and ill-tempered, even pushed back Aramis so rudely that Porthos raised his formidable fist and let it fall upon the floury face of a baker, which changed at once its color and became covered with blood, crushed as it was like a bunch of ripe grapes. The affair made a disturbance. Three men wished to attack Porthos; but Athos threw one aside, D'Artagnan another, and Porthos threw the third over his head. Some Englishmen, amateurs of boxing, appreciated the easy and rapid manner in which this was executed, and clapped their hands. It wanted little, then, that instead of being beaten terribly, as they began to fear, Porthos and his friends were not carried in triumph. But our four travellers, who feared everything that could make them conspicuous, succeeded in declining the ovation. However, they gained one thing from this Herculean demonstration, that the crowd opened before them and they accomplished the result, which seemed a moment before impossible, of reaching the palace.

All London was crowding at the doors of the galleries, so when the four friends succeeded in getting into one,

they found the three front rows already filled. That was a small loss for persons not wishing to be recognized; they therefore took their places with satisfaction, except Porthos, who wanted to show off his red doublet and green breeches, and preferred the front row.

The seats were arranged as in an amphitheatre, and from their places the friends overlooked the whole assembly. As chance would have it, they were in the middle of the gallery facing the chair set for Charles I.

About eleven o'clock in the morning the king appeared at the threshold of the hall. He was surrounded by guards, and kept his hat on, with a calm, assured look which travelled in all directions, as if he had come to preside over an assembly of obedient subjects, rather than to answer the accusations of a rebel court.

The judges, proud of having a king to humiliate, were evidently prepared to use the right which they had arrogated to themselves. Consequently an usher came to inform Charles I. that it was the usage for the accused to be uncovered.

Charles, without making any reply, pressed his hat more firmly on his head, which he turned another way; then, when the usher had gone, he sat down on the chair set for him in front of the president, striking his boot with a small stick which he held in his hand. Parry, who accompanied him, stood up behind his chair.

D'Artagnan, instead of paying attention to all this ceremonial, was looking at Athos, whose countenance reflected all the emotions which the king, by an effort of self-control, succeeded in checking on his own. This agitation of Athos, who was usually so cold and calm, frightened D'Artagnan.

"I hope," said he, whispering in his friend's ear, "that

you are going to take an example from his Majesty, and not foolishly get killed in this cage."

"Set your mind at ease," said Athos, "on that point."

"Ah, ah!" continued D'Artagnan, "they seem to fear something, for see! they have doubled the posts; there were only halberds, now see! there are muskets. There is something now for all; the halberds are for the auditors on the floor, the muskets are meant for us."

"Thirty, forty, fifty, seventy men," said Porthos, counting the newly arrived soldiers.

"Ah!" said Aramis, "you are forgetting the officer, Porthos; yet it seems to me he well deserves the trouble of being counted."

"Holloa!" said D'Artagnan; and he became pale with rage, for he had recognized Mordaunt, who, with drawn sword, conducted the musketeers behind the king; that is to say, facing the galleries.

"Has he recognized us?" continued D'Artagnan, "because in that case I should promptly beat a retreat. I desire to die in my own way. I don't choose to be shot in a box."

"No," said Aramis, "he has not seen us. He sees only the king. With what eyes he looks at him, the insolent fellow! Does he hate his Majesty as much as he hates us?"

"*We* have deprived him only of his mother; the *king* of his name and property," said Athos.

"That 's true," said Aramis. "But, silence! the president is addressing the king."

In fact, President Bradshaw was questioning the illustrious accused.

"Stuart," he said to him, "listen while the names of your judges are called over, and address to the tribunal any observations you may wish to make."

The king, as if the words were not at all intended for him, turned his head another way. The president waited; and as no reply came, there was a momentary silence. Out of a hundred and sixty-three members whose names were called, only seventy-three answered, — for the rest, frightened at being accomplices in such an act, had kept away.

"I proceed with the roll-call," said Bradshaw, without seeming to notice the absence of three-fifths of the court, and he began to name in succession the members present and absent.

Those present answered with a loud or weak voice, according as they had, or did not have, the courage to uphold their opinions. A short silence followed the names of the absent, who were twice called.

The name of Colonel Fairfax came in its turn, and was followed by one of those intervals of short but solemn silence which declared the absence of those members who had not wished personally to take part in the trial.

"Colonel Fairfax!" Bradshaw repeated.

"Fairfax!" responded a mocking voice, which from its silvery quality proved to be that of a woman, "he has too much good sense to be here."

A great shout of laughter welcomed these words, spoken with that audacity which women derive from their weakness, — a weakness which wards off all thoughts of vengeance.

"That 's a woman's voice," exclaimed Aramis. "Ah! upon my word I would give much that she should be young and pretty;" and he got up on the seat to try and see whence the voice came.

"Upon my soul," said Aramis, "she *is* lovely! Look now, D'Artagnan, every one is staring at her, and in spite of Bradshaw's look she does not become pale."

"That is Lady Fairfax herself," said D'Artagnan; "you remember her, Porthos? We have seen her with her husband at General Cromwell's."

In a short time the quiet which had been interrupted by this episode was re-established, and the roll-call was resumed.

"These simpletons are going to break up the sitting, since they see they are not numerous enough," said Athos.

"You don't know them, Athos. Notice now the smile of Mordaunt; see how he looks at the king. It is the smile of satisfied hate, of vengeance certain of being satiated. Ah, you cursed basilisk! it will be a happy day for me when I shall cross with you something else besides a look."

"The king is truly a fine man," said Porthos; "then see how carefully he is dressed, though a prisoner. The feather of his hat is worth at least fifty pistoles; look at it, Aramis."

The roll-call being finished, the president ordered the bill of indictment to be read. Athos turned pale; he was once more deceived in his expectation. Although the number of judges was insufficient, the trial was going to proceed; the king was then condemned in advance.

"I told you so, Athos," said D'Artagnan, shrugging his shoulders. "But you are always sceptical. Now pluck up your courage and listen, I pray you, to all the petty horrors that that man in black is about telling his king with license and privilege."

In fact, never had more brutal accusations, never more base insults, never a more bloodthirsty inquisition yet stigmatized royal majesty. Until then they had been content with assassinating kings; and it was only on their dead bodies that they had heaped insults.

Charles I. listened to the discourse of the accuser with

very close attention, passing by the insults, remembering the wrongs; and when hate went too far and the accuser made himself an executioner in advance, he responded by a smile of contempt. It was after all a capital and terrible instrument, in which this unhappy king found all his imprudences changed into ambushes, his errors transformed into crimes.

D'Artagnan, who allowed this torrent to flow by with all the contempt it deserved, yet brought his judicial mind to bear on some of the counts of the indictment.

"The fact is," said he, "that if they punish imprudence and frivolity, this poor king merits punishment; but it seems to me that what he is bearing at this moment is cruel enough."

"In any case," replied Aramis, "punishment ought not to affect the king, but his ministers, since the first principle of the English constitution is: The king can do no wrong."

"As for me," thought Porthos, looking at Mordaunt and only occupying himself with him, "if it was not for troubling the solemnity of the occasion, I would jump down from the gallery; in three bounds I would fall upon M. Mordaunt, whom I would strangle. I would take him by the feet and I would crush all those miserable musketeers who parody the Musketeers of France. During this time, D'Artagnan, who is full of wit and readiness, would find perhaps a means of saving the king. I must speak to him about it."

As for Athos, with fire in his eyes, his hands nervously twitching, his lips covered with blood from biting them, he sat foaming and furious at this eternal parliamentary insult and this long royal patience; so that his inflexible arm and mighty heart became a trembling hand and a shivering body.

At this moment the prosecutor finished with these words : —

" The present indictment is made by us in the name of the English people."

At these words there was a murmur in the galleries ; and another voice, not a woman's, but a man's, loud and furious, thundered behind D'Artagnan : —

" You lie ! " it said, " and nine-tenths of the English people are horrified at what you say."

It was Athos, who, losing control over himself, and standing up with extended arm, had thus addressed the public prosecutor. At this apostrophe, king, judges, spectators, everybody in short, turned their eyes towards the gallery where the four friends were. Mordaunt looked up like the rest, and recognized the gentleman, around whom were standing the other three Frenchmen, pale and threatening. Mordaunt's eyes lighted up with joy ; he had found those to whose capture and death he had vowed his life. A furious movement called to him twenty of his musketeers, and pointing to the gallery in which were his enemies, " Fire into that gallery ! " said he.

But then, quick as thought, D'Artagnan seizing Athos by the middle of his body, and Porthos carrying Aramis, they leaped down the steps, dashed along the passages, descended the staircase, and were lost in the crowd ; while inside the hall the levelled muskets threatened three thousand spectators, whose cries for mercy and noisy fears checked the outburst already tending to carnage.

Charles also had recognized the four Frenchmen ; he put his hand to his heart to repress its beatings, the other over his eyes so as not to see his faithful friends killed.

Mordaunt, pale and trembling with rage, dashed out of

the hall with ten halberdiers, searching the crowd, questioning, panting; but he returned without having found them.

The disturbance was hard to suppress. More than half-an-hour passed before any one could be heard. The judges believed each gallery ready to thunder. The galleries saw the muskets directed towards them, and divided between fear and curiosity, remained tumultuous and excited. At last quiet was re-established.

"What have you to say in your defence?" asked Bradshaw of the king.

Then, in the tone of a judge, not of one accused, with his head still covered, standing up not at all from humiliation, but as a ruler, "Before questioning me," said Charles, "answer me. I was free at Newcastle, and there concluded an agreement with the two Houses. Instead of performing your part of this treaty, as I have mine, you have bought me of the Scots; not dearly, I know, and that does honor to the economy of your government. But after having paid for me the price of a slave, do you think that I cease to be your king? No. To reply to you would be to forget it. I will not reply until you have proved your right to question me. To reply to you would be to recognize you as my judges, and I recognize you only as my executioners;" and in the midst of a deathlike silence, Charles, calm, haughty, with covered head, sat down again.

"Why are not my Frenchmen there?" murmured Charles, with pride, turning his eyes towards the gallery, where they had appeared an instant; "they would see that their friend, living, is worthy of being defended, dead, of being mourned." But he in vain tried to sound the depth of the crowd, and to ask as it were of God those sweet and consoling presences. He saw only stupefied

and fearful faces; he felt that he was battling with hatred and ferocity.

"Well," said the president, on seeing Charles invincibly determined not to speak, "be it so; we shall try you in spite of your silence. You are accused of treason, abuse of power, and of assassination. The witnesses will prove all this. Go; the next sitting will accomplish what you refuse to do at this."

Charles rose, and turning towards Parry, whom he saw looking pale, and whose forehead was damp from perspiration, "Well, my dear Parry, what's the matter with you? and what agitates you so?"

"Oh, Sire," said Parry, with tears in his eyes, and quivering voice, "on leaving the hall, do not look to your left."

"Why not, Parry? What is the matter?" said Charles, trying to see through the hedge of guards who were behind him.

"The matter is — but you will not look, Sire, will you — it is that on a table they have had the axe placed with which criminals are executed. This sight is hideous; do not look at it, Sire, I beg of you."

"The fools!" said Charles; "do they think me a coward then like themselves? You did well to forewarn me; thanks, Parry." And as the moment came to withdraw, the king went out, following his guards.

At the left of the door, indeed, the white axe, polished by the executioner's hand, shone with an inauspicious lustre on the red cloth on which it was placed. Charles stopped before it, and turning round, "Ah," said he, "the axe! — an ingenious bugbear, and well worthy of those who do not know how to treat a gentleman. I am not afraid of you," he added, striking it with the stick in his hand, "and I strike you, waiting patiently and

Christian-like till you return the blow;" and shrugging his shoulders with regal disdain, he moved on, leaving stupefied those who had pressed round the table to watch the king's looks on seeing the axe that was to behead him.

"In truth, Parry," continued the king, "all these people take me, God pardon me! for an East Indian cotton merchant, and not for a gentleman accustomed to see the glitter of steel. They think that I have not as much courage as a butcher!"

By that time he had reached the gate; a long line of people had run to it, who, unable to get into the galleries, wished to enjoy at least the end of the spectacle. This countless multitude, whose ranks were thickly sown with menacing faces, drew a slight sigh from the king.

"What a crowd!" he thought, "and not one devoted friend!" and as he said to himself these words of doubt and discouragement, a voice responding to these thoughts said near him, "God bless his fallen Majesty!"

The king turned round quickly with tears in his eyes. It was a veteran of the king's Guards, who would not allow his captive king to pass him without paying him this last act of homage. But at the same moment the unfortunate soldier was almost stunned by blows from a sword-hilt. Among the strikers, the king recognized Captain Groslow.

"Alas!" said Charles, "a harsh chastisement for a small fault."

Then with wounded heart he went on; but he had not gone a hundred yards before a furious creature, stooping down between two soldiers of the escort, spat in the king's face, as formerly an infamous and accursed Jew spat in the face of Jesus the Nazarene.

Great bursts of laughter and murmurs were heard to-

gether; the crowd separated, came together again, undulated like a tempestuous sea, and it seemed to the king that he could see in the midst of the living wave the flashing eyes of Athos. Charles wiped his face and said with a sad smile, "The wretch! for half-a-crown he would do the same to his father."

The king was not deceived; he had really seen Athos and his friends, who, again mixed up with the groups, followed the martyr king with a last look. When the soldier saluted Charles, Athos's heart beat with joy; and when the soldier recovered himself, he found in his pocket ten guineas that the French gentleman had slipped into it. But when the cowardly rascal spit in the king's face, Athos put his hand to his poniard. But D'Artagnan stopped the hand, and in a hoarse voice, "Wait!" said he.

Athos stopped. D'Artagnan leaned upon Athos's arm made a sign to Porthos and Aramis to keep close to them, and got behind the man with the naked arms, who was still laughing at his dastardly jest, and receiving the congratulations of others as rascally. This man, who seemed a butcher's apprentice, took the road to the city, and with two companions turned down a small, steep, isolated street leading to the river. D'Artagnan had let go Athos's arm, and was walking behind the insulter. On getting near the river, the three men perceived that they were followed, stopped, and looking insolently at the Frenchmen, exchanged some jests with one another.

"I don't know English, Athos," said D'Artagnan; "but you know it, and can act as interpreter for me."

Then, doubling his pace, he passed the three men. But turning round suddenly, D'Artagnan went straight up to the man with bare arms who seemed to be a butcher.

The man stopped, and D'Artagnan, touching him on the chest with his forefinger, said to his friend, "Say this to him, Athos: You have been a coward; you have insulted a defenceless man; you have spit in the face of your king. You shall die!"

Athos, pale as a ghost, translated these strange words to the man, who, seeing these preparations and D'Artagnan's glaring eyes, put himself in an attitude of defence. Aramis at this movement carried his hand to his sword.

"No, not the steel, not the steel!" said D'Artagnan; "the steel is for gentlemen." Seizing the butcher by the throat, "Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "crush this wretch with a single blow."

Porthos raised his terrible arm, made it whiz in the air like a sling, and the weighty mass dropped with a dull thud on the coward's skull, which it broke. The man fell down like an ox under the hammer. His companions tried to cry out and flee; but their voice failed them, and their legs gave under them.

"Tell them also this, Athos," continued D'Artagnan: "Thus will die all those who forget that the head of a prisoner is sacred, and that a captive king is doubly the representative of the Lord."

Athos repeated the words of D'Artagnan. The two men, mute, their hair standing on end, regarded the body of their companion, which was lying in a pool of black blood; then finding at once voice and strength, they took flight with a cry and joining their hands.

"Justice is done!" said Porthos, wiping his forehead.

"And now," said D'Artagnan to Athos, "don't at all doubt me, and let your mind be at rest. I take upon myself all that concerns the king."

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHITEHALL.

THE Parliament condemned Charles Stuart to death, as it was easy to foresee. Political trials are always empty formalities, for the same passions which bring the accusation pronounce the judgment also. Such is the terrible logic of revolutions.

Although our friends expected this result, it yet filled them with grief. D'Artagnan, whose mind was most fruitful of resources in the most critical moments, again swore that he would attempt everything possible to prevent the end of this bloody tragedy. But how? That was what he as yet only saw vaguely. All depended on the nature of the circumstances. Meanwhile, until a complete plan could be arranged, it was necessary at any price to gain time, to prevent the execution from taking place the next day as the judges had decided. The only means was to remove the executioner from London. This done, the sentence could not be carried out. Without doubt one from the town nearest to London would be sent for; but that would cause the gain of a day at least, and a day in such a case might be salvation, perhaps. D'Artagnan undertook this more than difficult task.

A matter not less necessary was to warn Charles Stuart of their attempt to save him, so that he might, as far as possible, second their efforts, or at least do nothing to frustrate them. Aramis undertook this perilous task. Charles had asked permission for Bishop Juxon to visit

him in his prison at Whitehall. Mordaunt had that very evening been to the bishop's to acquaint him with the king's desire as well as Cromwell's acquiescence. Aramis resolved to obtain from the bishop, either by terror or persuasion, permission to let him assume his dress and so get admission to Whitehall. Then Athos undertook to have ready, in any case, the means of leaving England in case of failure or success.

Night being come, they fixed upon eleven o'clock for meeting again at the inn; and each started off on his dangerous mission.

Whitehall was guarded by three regiments of cavalry, and still more by the unceasing anxiety of Cromwell, who was going to and fro, and sending his generals or his agents continually.

Alone, and in his accustomed room, which was lighted by two wax candles, the condemned monarch sorrowfully regarded his past grandeur, as on his death-bed one sees the image of life more brilliant and sweet than ever. Parry was still with his master, and since his condemnation had not ceased weeping.

Charles Stuart, leaning on a table, was looking at a medallion, on which were the portraits of his wife and daughter. He was awaiting first Juxon; after Juxon, martyrdom.

Sometimes his thoughts rested upon those brave French gentlemen, who already appeared removed a hundred leagues, fabulous, chimerical, and like those figures one sees in dreams and which disappear on waking. Sometimes Charles asked himself if all that had just happened to him was not a dream, or at least the delirium of a fever.

While thus thinking, he rose, took a few steps as if to shake off his torpor, went to the window, and just below

it he saw the muskets of the guards. Then he was compelled to confess that he was indeed awake, and that his bloody dream was very real. He returned silent to his chair, again leaned on the table, and mused.

"Alas!" he said to himself, "if I only had as confessor one of those luminaries of the Church whose soul has sounded the mysteries of life, and all its littlenesses, his words might perhaps silence the voice which utters its wailing in my soul. But I shall have a priest of common mind, whose career I have cut short by my misfortune. He will talk to me of God and death, as to other dying men, without understanding that I am leaving a throne to a usurper, while my children will be without bread." Then raising the portrait to his lips, he quietly mentioned by name each of his children.

It was, as we have said, a misty, dark night. The hour was slowly struck by the neighboring church clock. The pale light of the two candles showed in that large, lofty apartment phantoms lighted up by strange reflections. These phantoms were King Charles's ancestors, who seemed to come forth from their frames of gold; these reflections were the last bluish flickering lights of a coal fire, which was going out.

A deep sadness seized upon Charles. He thought of the world, which seems so beautiful when one is about leaving it; of the caresses of his children, which one feels to be so sweet and gentle when one is separated from them never to see them again; then of his wife, that noble, courageous creature who had sustained him to the very last. He drew from his breast the cross of diamonds and the Star of the Garter which she had sent him by those generous Frenchmen, and kissed them; then remembering that she would never see these objects again until he was laid cold and beheaded in the tomb, he felt one of those cold shivers

pass over him which death throws about us as its first cloak.

Then in this room which recalled to him so many royal memories, where had passed so many courtiers and so many flatteries, alone with a despairing servitor whose feeble soul could not support that of royalty, the king suffered his courage to fall to the level of this weakness, of this darkness, and of this winter cold; and — shall we say it? — this king who died so grandly, so sublimely, with the smile of resignation on his lips, wiped away in the shadow a tear which had fallen on the table and trembled on the gold embroidered cloth.

Suddenly steps were heard in the corridors; the door opened, torches filled the chamber with a smoky light, and an ecclesiastic in episcopal dress entered, followed by two guards. The latter retired; the chamber returned to its obscurity.

"Juxon!" exclaimed Charles. "Thanks, my last friend! you come very opportunely."

The bishop cast a side-long, suspicious look on the man who was sobbing in the chimney corner.

"Come, Parry," said the king, "don't weep any more; God has come to us."

"If it is Parry," said the bishop, "I have nothing further to fear; so, Sire, permit me to salute your Majesty, and to say who I am, and for what I have come."

On hearing the voice, Charles was going to make an exclamation, but Aramis put his fingers to his lips, and made a low bow to the King of England.

"The chevalier!" murmured Charles.

"Yes, Sire," said Aramis, raising his voice, — "yes, Bishop Juxon, faithful chevalier of Christ, who comes at the desire of your Majesty."

Charles joined his hands together. He had recognized

D'Herblay; he felt stupefied, astounded in the presence of these men, who, foreigners, without any other motive than a sense of duty imposed by conscience, were thus struggling against a people's will and a king's destiny.

"You!" he said, — "you! how have you succeeded in reaching here? Good heavens! if they recognize you, you will be lost."

Parry was standing; his whole figure expressed a naïve and profound admiration.

"Don't think of me, Sire," said Aramis, enjoining silence on him; "think only of yourself. Your friends are watching, as you see. What we shall do I know not yet; but four determined men can do much. Meanwhile, do not close your eyes to-night; don't be astonished at anything, and await everything."

Charles shook his head.

"Friend," said he, "do you know that you have no time to lose, and that if you are going to act, you must make haste. At ten to-morrow I must die."

"Sire, something will happen meanwhile which will render the execution impossible."

The king looked at Aramis with astonishment. At that moment even a strange sound was heard beneath the window, like that of a load of wood being unloaded.

"Do you hear?" said the king.

This sound was followed by a cry of pain.

"I hear," said Aramis; "but I don't understand the noise, and especially that cry."

"I don't know who uttered the cry," said the king; "but the sound I am going to explain to you. Do you know that I am to be executed outside this window?" Charles added, pointing towards the outside, which was guarded by soldiers and sentinels.

"Yes, Sire, I know it."

"Well, these beams are for my scaffold. Some workman has been wounded in the unloading of them." Aramis shivered in spite of himself. "You see it is useless to persevere any longer. I am condemned; leave me to my fate."

"Sire," said Aramis, resuming his composure, "they may erect the scaffold, but they will be unable to find an executioner."

"What do you mean?" the king asked.

"I mean, Sire, that the executioner is by this time carried away or bribed, and they will have to postpone the execution till the next day."

"Well?"

"Well, to-morrow night we will carry you off."

"How can that be done?" exclaimed the king, whose face was lighted up by a flash of joy.

"Oh, Monsieur!" murmured Parry, his hands joined, "may you be blessed, you and yours!"

"I must know this," said the king, "in order to second your efforts if I can."

"I know not, Sire; but the cleverest, the bravest, the most devoted of us four told me when leaving, 'Chevalier, tell the king that to-morrow at ten at night we will rescue him.' Since he has said this, he will do it."

"Tell me the name of this generous friend that I may preserve lasting gratitude for him, whether he succeed or not."

"D'Artagnan, Sire, the same who failed in saving you when Colonel Harrison entered so inopportunely."

"You are, in fact, wonderful men; and if I had been told of such deeds, I should not have believed them."

"Now, Sire, listen to me. Do not forget that we are watching for your safety every moment; the smallest

gesture, the slightest song, the least sign from those who approach you, watch, listen to, criticise everything."

"Oh, Chevalier, what can I say? No words, coming even from the depths of my heart, could express my gratitude. If you succeed, I will not say that you save a king, — no, in the sight of the scaffold, royalty is a small thing, — but you will preserve a husband to his wife, a father to his children. Chevalier, press my hand; it is that of a friend who will love you to his last sigh."

Aramis wished to kiss the king's hand, but the king seized his and pressed it against his heart.

Just then a man entered without even knocking at the door; he who entered was one of those Puritan half-priests, half-soldiers of whom there were swarms about Cromwell.

"What do you want, sir?" said the king.

"I want to know if Charles Stuart's confession is ended."

"What matters it to you? We are not of the same religion."

"All men are brethren. One of my brethren is about to die, and I am come to prepare him for death."

"Enough," said Parry; "the king has nothing to do with your exhortations."

"Sire," said Aramis, in a low voice, "treat him gently; he is probably a spy."

"After the reverend bishop," said the king, "I will hear you with pleasure."

The man retired with a dubious look, not without having observed Juxon with a scrutiny which did not escape the king.

"Chevalier," said he, when the door was closed, "I believe you were right, and that the man came with bad intentions; take care when you withdraw that no harm happen to you."

"Sire, I thank your Majesty, but don't be uneasy; under this robe I have a coat of mail and a poniard."

"Go then, Monsieur, and may God keep you in safety, as I used to say when I was king."

Aramis went out; Charles conducted him to the door. Aramis pronounced his blessing, which made the guards bow, passed majestically through the anterooms, which were filled with soldiers, entered his coach, and returned to the bishop. Juxon awaited him with some anxiety.

"Well?" said he, when he saw Aramis.

"Well," said the latter, "all has succeeded according to my wishes; spies, guards, satellites took me for you, and the king blesses you, waiting for you to bless him."

"God protect you, my son, for your example has given me both hope and courage."

Aramis resumed his clothes and cloak, and then left, informing Juxon that he should once more have recourse to him. He had gone scarcely ten yards when he saw that he was followed by a man wrapped up in an ample cloak. The man came straight towards him. It was Porthos.

"My dear friend!" said Aramis, giving him his hand.

"You see, my dear fellow, that each of us has his work; mine was to guard you, and I was doing so. Have you seen the king?"

"Yes; and all goes on well. But where are our friends?"

"We appointed eleven o'clock for meeting at the inn."

"There is no time to lose, then."

In fact, half-past ten then struck by the clock of St. Paul's. However, as they made haste, they arrived first. After them came Athos.

"All is right," said he, before his friends had had time to question him.

"What have you done?" said Aramis.

"I have hired a little felucca, narrow like a *pirogue*, swift as a swallow. It awaits us at Greenwich, opposite the Isle of Dogs; it has a captain and crew of four, who for fifty pounds will be at our disposal for the next three nights. Once on board with the king, we will go down the Thames, and in two hours will be in the open sea. Then like true pirates we will keep to the coast, or if the sea is free, we will make head for Boulogne. Should I be killed, the captain's name is Rogers, and the felucca's the 'Lightning.' A handkerchief knotted at the corners is the sign of recognition."

A short time after, D'Artagnan came in.

"Empty your pockets," said he, "and make up a hundred pounds, — for as for mine," and D'Artagnan turned his inside out, "they are empty."

The amount was soon made up. D'Artagnan went out, but returned a moment after.

"There!" said he, "it is finished. *Ouf!* not without trouble."

"The executioner has left London?" Athos asked.

"Ah, well! that was not quite sure enough. He could go out at one gate and enter again by another."

"And where is he?" asked Athos.

"In the cellar of the inn. Mousqueton is seated at the door; and here's the key."

"Bravo!" said Aramis. "But how did you get the man to agree to be out of the way?"

"As everything is decided in this world, — by money; it has cost me a good deal, but he has agreed to it."

"And how much did it cost you, friend?" said Athos; "for you understand that we are no longer poor musketeers without house and home, and that all expenditure must be in common."

"It has cost me twelve thousand livres," said D'Artagnan.

"And how did you raise that sum? Did you possess it?"

"From the queen's famous diamond," said D'Artagnan, with a sigh.

"Ah, that 's true; I have noticed it on your finger."

"You had re-purchased it of M. d'Essarts?" asked Porthos.

"Ah, yes! but it is written that I should not be able to keep it. What would you have? Diamonds, so one is told to believe, have their likes and dislikes, like men; it seems that that one detested me."

"But," said Athos, "although matters are all arranged as far as the executioner is concerned, unfortunately they have their assistants, as I know."

"Yes, that one has his; but we are in luck's way."

"How so?"

"Just when I thought I was going to have a second bargain to strike, my man was brought home with a fractured thigh. From an excess of zeal he accompanied the wagon which carried the beams and framing timber for the scaffold; one of the beams fell on his leg and fractured it."

"Ah," said Aramis, "it was he, then, who uttered the cry which I heard when in the king's chamber."

"That 's probable," said D'Artagnan; "but as he is a very thoughtful man, he promised when leaving to send four skilful men to help those already engaged in the work; and on returning to his master's house, he wrote at once to Mr. Tom Low, a journeyman carpenter, who is a friend of his, to be at Whitehall to fulfil his promise. This is the letter, which he sent by a special messenger who was to take it for tenpence, and who has sold it to me for a louis."

"And what the devil do you mean to do with that letter?" Athos asked.

"You do not guess?" said D'Artagnan, whose eyes brightened up with intelligence.

"No, upon my soul!"

"Well, my dear Athos, who speak English as well as John Bull himself, you are Mr. Tom Low, and we are his three companions; now do you understand?"

Athos burst forth into exclamations of joy and gratitude, ran to a closet, and took out some workmen's clothes, in which the four friends dressed themselves; after which they left the inn, Athos carrying a saw, Porthos a crowbar, Aramis an axe, and D'Artagnan a hammer and nails.

The letter of the executioner's assistant proved to the master carpenter that they were the men whom he had been expecting.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WORKMEN.

Towards the middle of the night, Charles heard a great noise under his window; it was caused by hammering, chopping, and sawing. As he had thrown himself on his bed dressed, and was just going to sleep, the disturbance awoke him with a start; and as besides its material influence, it called up a moral and terrible echo in his soul, the frightful thoughts of the evening began to return afresh. Alone, facing the darkness and isolation, he had not strength to bear this new torture, which formed no part of his punishment, so he sent Parry with word to the sentinel to beg the workmen to make less noise, and have pity for the last sleep of him who had been their king. The sentinel did not wish to leave his post, but allowed Parry to pass. On coming near the window after having made the circuit of the palace, Parry perceived on a level with the balcony, the railing of which had been removed, a large unfinished scaffold, but on which they were beginning to nail a hanging of black cloth.

This scaffold, raised to the height of the window — that is, about twenty feet from the ground — had two lower stages. Parry, how hateful soever to him was the sight, looked among the eight or ten workmen who were erecting the hideous structure to discover those whose blows were most fatiguing to the king, and on the second stage he saw two men who were removing by the aid of a

crowbar the last holdfasts of the iron balcony; one of them, a veritable colossus, was doing the work of the ancient battering-ram. At each stroke of his bar the stone flew into shivers. The other on his knees was removing the loosened stones. It was very evident that these were making the noise of which the king so complained. Parry went up the ladder, and came to them.

"My friends," said he, "will you work with a little less noise, I beg of you? The king is asleep, and he has need of rest."

The man who was striking with the crowbar stopped, and turned half round; but as he was standing, Parry could not see his face, lost as it was in the darkness, which was thick near the stage. The man on his knees also turned round; and as he was lower than his comrade, his face was lighted up by the lantern, so that Parry could see it. This man looked hard at him, and put his finger to his mouth. Parry stepped back stupefied.

"Very well, very well," said the workman, in good English; "return and tell the king that if he sleeps badly to-night, he will sleep better to-morrow night."

This coarse speech, which taken literally had a terrible meaning, was received by the workmen with an explosion of tumultuous applause. Parry withdrew, believing himself to be in a dream. Charles awaited him with impatience. Just as he entered the room, the sentinel on guard at the door put in his head to see what the king was doing. The king was on his bed, leaning on his elbow. Parry closed the door, and went to the king, his face radiant with joy.

"Sire," said he, in a low voice, "do you know who those workmen are who are making so much noise?"

"No," said Charles, with a melancholy shake of the head; "how can I know that? Do I know those men?"

"Sire," said Parry, leaning over the bed and speaking

in a lower tone, "it is the Comte de la Fère and his companion."

"Who are making my scaffold?" inquired the king, astonished.

"Yes, and while doing so are making a hole in the wall."

"*Chut!*" said the king, looking round with terror. "You saw them?"

"I spoke to them."

The king joined his hands together, and said a short, fervent prayer. He then went to the window, and drew aside the curtains. The sentinels were still at their posts on the balcony; just beyond it was a sombre platform on which they were moving like shadows. Charles could distinguish nothing more, but he heard beneath his feet the sound of the blows, and each of these found an echo in his heart.

Parry had not been mistaken, and had recognized Athos. He it was indeed who, with the help of Porthos, was making a hole in which one of the transverse beams was to rest. This hole communicated with a sort of cavity existing under the very floor of the royal chamber. Access once gained to this, it was possible by means of a crowbar and good shoulders — and this latter requisite was what Porthos possessed — to loosen one of the floor-boards; the king then could slip through this opening, hide in one of the compartments of the scaffold, which was entirely covered with black cloth, put on a workman's clothes which had been procured, and then without fear descend with his four companions.

The sentinels, without suspicion, seeing workmen who had been engaged on the scaffold, would allow them to pass. As we have said, the felucca was all ready.

The plan of escape was comprehensive, simple, and easy, as are all things which spring from bold resolution.

Therefore Athos was scratching his white, delicate hands to raise the stones torn from their positions by Porthos.

Already he could pass his head under the ornaments decorating the edge of the balcony. Two hours more, and he could pass his whole body. Before daylight the hole would be finished, and would be concealed under the folds of an interior hanging which D'Artagnan would place there. D'Artagnan had passed himself off as a French workman, and placed his nails with the regularity of the most skilful upholsterer. Aramis was cutting off the surplus of the serge which was hanging down to the ground, and behind which arose the frame-work of the scaffold.

The day at last broke. A large fire of peat and coal had helped the workmen to pass this cold night of the 29th of January. At every moment the most determined workers interrupted their work to go and warm themselves. Athos and Porthos alone had not quitted their work ; so at the early dawn the hole was finished. Athos entered it, carrying with him the clothes intended for the king wrapped up in a bit of black cloth. Porthos passed him a crowbar, and D'Artagnan nailed up a hanging of cloth which concealed the hole.

Athos had no more than two hours' work to do to enable him to communicate with the king, and the four friends now thought that they had the whole day before them, since as the executioner was not forthcoming, one must be obtained from Bristol.

D'Artagnan went off to resume his maroon dress, and Porthos his red doublet ; as for Aramis, he went to the bishop's, in order, if possible, to gain access with him to the king.

The three had arranged to meet at noon before Whitehall, to see what might be going on there. Before leaving the scaffold, Aramis came to the opening where Athos was

hidden to tell him that he was going to try and see Charles again.

"Adieu, then, and be of good courage," said Athos. "Tell the king how matters stand; tell him that when he is alone he is to knock on the floor, that I may continue my task with certainty. If Parry can help me by removing beforehand the lower slab of the chimney, that would be so much done in advance. You, Aramis, try not to leave the king. Speak loud, very loud, for they will be listening at the door. If there is a sentinel in the room, kill him without hesitating about it; if two, let Parry slay one and you the other; if there are three, let yourself be killed, but at all risk save the king."

"Don't be disturbed," said Aramis; "I will take two poniards, so as to let Parry have one. Is that all?"

"Yes, now go; but urge the king not to be too much influenced by a false generosity. While you are fighting, if it *must* be, let him escape; the hearth-stone once replaced over his head, and you, dead or alive, on it, it will take at least ten minutes to discover the hole by which he has escaped. During these ten minutes we shall have started on our way, and the king will be saved."

"It shall be done as you say, Athos. Your hand, for perhaps we shall never see each other again."

Athos passed his arms round the neck of Aramis and embraced him.

"For you," said he, "now if I die, say to D'Artagnan that I love him like a child, and embrace him for me. Embrace also our good and brave Porthos. Adieu."

"Adieu," said Aramis. "I am as sure now that the king will effect his escape as I am of pressing the most loyal hand to be found in the world."

Aramis left, and went back to the inn, whistling an air in praise of Cromwell. He found the two others

seated near a good fire, drinking a bottle of port and devouring a cold fowl. Porthos was eating, while uttering many curses against these infamous doings of the Parliamentarians; D'Artagnan was eating in silence, all the time concocting the most daring plans.

Aramis told all that was agreed upon; D'Artagnan nodded assent, Porthos approved audibly.

"Bravo!" he said; "besides, we shall be there at the time of the flight. There is a good hiding-place under the scaffold, and we can keep in it. Between D'Artagnan, myself, Grimaud, and Mousqueton, we can easily kill eight of them. At two minutes per man, that's four minutes; Mousqueton will lose one, that makes five. During these five minutes you will have gone a quarter of a league."

Aramis ate a morsel quickly, drank a glass of wine, and changed his clothes.

"Now," said he, "I am going to the Right Reverend's. Look well after the arms, Porthos; keep a watch over the executioner, D'Artagnan."

"All right; Grimaud has relieved Mousqueton, and has his foot on the trap-door."

"No matter; re-double your watchfulness, and don't remain an instant inactive."

"Inactive! my dear fellow, ask Porthos. I don't live; I am always on my legs. I have the air of a *danseur. Mordioux!* how I love France at this moment, and how good it is to have a country of one's own, when one is so badly off in the country of others!"

Aramis left them, as he had left Athos, after embracing them; then he went to Bishop Juxon's, to whom he sent his request. The bishop consented the more readily to take him, as he had foreseen the need of a priest in case the king should desire to receive the communion.

Aramis, still more disguised by his pallor and sadness than by his deacon's dress, entered the coach with him. It was scarcely nine when the coach reached Whitehall. Nothing seemed changed; the anterooms and passages were filled with guards. Two sentinels kept watch at the door, two others walked up and down on the platform of the scaffold, on which the block was already placed.

The king was full of hope; this, on seeing Aramis, became joy. He embraced Juxon; he pressed the hand of Aramis. The bishop talked in a loud voice of their interview on the preceding evening. The king replied that what had passed on that occasion had borne fruit, and that he desired another conversation. Juxon turned towards those present, and begged them to leave him alone with the king. All retired. When the door was closed, "Sire," said Aramis, quickly, "you are saved! The executioner of London has disappeared; his assistant has broken his thigh. Doubtless they have already noticed the disappearance of the executioner, but there is none nearer than the one at Bristol, and time is needed to send for him. We have then, at least, till to-morrow."

"But the Comte de la Fère?" asked the king.

"Is two feet from you, Sire. Take the poker and give three knocks; he will make you an answer."

The king did so, and immediately, replying to the signal, some taps were heard under the floor.

"So," said the king, "he who replies there —"

"Is the Comte de la Fère, who is preparing the way by which your Majesty will escape. Parry will lift up this slab of marble, and a passage will be opened."

"But," said Parry, "I have no tools."

"Take this poniard," said Aramis; "only avoid blunting it too much, for you will soon have need of it for digging something else than stone."

"Oh, Juxon!" said Charles, turning towards the bishop, and taking his two hands, — "Juxon, listen to the prayer of him who was once your king —"

"Who is still, and always will be," said Juxon, kissing the king's hand.

"Pray all your life for this gentleman whom you see here, for the other whom you hear under our feet, for two others, who, wherever they may be, are, I am sure, watching for my safety."

"Sire," replied Juxon, "you shall be obeyed. Every day, so long as I live, a prayer shall be offered for these faithful friends of your Majesty."

The underminer continued for some time at his work, and they heard him drawing closer and closer. But all of a sudden an unexpected noise was heard in the gallery. Aramis seized the poker, and gave the signal to stop working.

The noise became louder; it was a tramp of regular steps. The four men remained still, with their eyes fixed on the door, which was quietly opened, and with a sort of solemnity.

Some guards were formed in line in the anteroom to the king's chamber. A parliamentary commissioner, clothed in black, and with a gravity which augured ill, entered, saluted the king, and unrolling a parchment, read to him his sentence, as is the practice in the case of those who are going to die on the scaffold.

"What does that mean?" Aramis asked of Juxon.

Juxon made a sign to intimate that he was as ignorant as Aramis.

"It is, then, settled for to-day?" the king asked, with an emotion only perceptible to Juxon and Aramis.

"Were you not previously told, Sire, that it was settled for this morning?" replied the man in black.

"And," said the king, "must I perish like a common criminal by the hands of the executioner of London?"

"He has disappeared, Sire; but a man has offered to take his place. The execution will be delayed only to give you the time you may request for putting your temporal and spiritual affairs in order."

A slight perspiration, which came forth like beads from the roots of Charles's hair, was the only mark of the emotion he showed on learning this news.

But Aramis became livid. His heart stopped beating; he closed his eyes, and rested his hand on a table. On observing this deep grief, Charles seemed to forget his own. He went to him, took him by the hand, and embraced him.

"Come, friend," said he, with a sweet, sad smile, "keep up your courage." Then turning towards the commissioner, "Sir," he said, "I am ready. There are only two things I desire, which will not delay you much, — to receive the communion, and to embrace and say farewell to my children for the last time. Will these be allowed me?"

"Yes, Sire," replied the commissioner, and he left.

Aramis recovered his composure, and uttered a loud groan.

"Oh, Monseigneur!" exclaimed he, seizing Juxon by the hands; "where is God? where is he?"

"My son," said the bishop, with firmness, "you do not see him because earthly passions hide him from you."

"My child," said the king to Aramis, "do not grieve so. You ask what God is doing? God sees your devotion and my martyrdom, and believe me, both will be recompensed; then blame men for what happens, and not God. It is men who kill me; it is men who make you mourn."

"Yes, Sire," said Aramis; "you are right. It is men whom I must and will blame."

"Sit down, Juxon," said the king, falling on his knees, "for you must now listen to my confession. Stay, Monsieur," he said to Aramis, who made a movement to retire; "stay, Parry, I have nothing to say, even by way of confession, which cannot be said before you all; stay, and I have but one regret, which is that the whole world cannot hear me as you all do."

Juxon seated himself, and the king, kneeling before him as the humblest of the faithful, began his confession.

CHAPTER XXV.

REMEMBER.

On finishing his confession, Charles received the communion; he then asked to see his children. Ten o'clock struck; as the king had said, the delay had not been great.

The populace had already gathered; it was known that ten was the hour fixed for the execution. All the streets adjacent to the palace were crowded; and the king began to distinguish the distant noise which only a crowd and the sea make, — the former when agitated by their passions, the latter by storms.

The king's children came, — the Princess Charlotte[1] and the Duke of Gloucester; the one a pretty little fair girl, whose eyes were moist with tears, the other a boy about nine, whose dry eye and lip disdainfully projecting implied a growing haughtiness. The boy had wept all night; but before all these spectators he did not weep.

Charles felt his heart breaking at the sight of these children, whom he had not seen for two years, and whom he saw now just before his death. A tear came to his eye, and he turned away to wipe it off, for he wished to appear composed before those to whom he was leaving such a weighty legacy of suffering and misfortune.

He first talked to the girl; drawing her towards him, he recommended her to be pious, and resigned, and to show filial love. Then he took the young Duke of Gloucester

[1] Elizabeth.

on his knee that he might press him to his heart and kiss him.

"My son," he said to him, "you have seen many people in the streets and antechambers; these people are going to cut off your father's head. Do not forget it. Perhaps one day, having you in their power, they will want to make you king instead of the Prince of Wales or the Duke of York, your elder brothers; but you are not the king, my son, and you can become so only by your brothers' death. Promise, therefore, not to let the people put the crown on your head until you have a lawful right to it. For one day — listen, my son, attentively — if you do so they will take away all, both head and crown, and then you will not die as calmly as I am dying. Promise this, my son."

The child stretched out his little hand, put it into his father's, and said, "Sire, I promise your Majesty —"

Charles interrupted him.

"Henry, call me your father."

"My father, I promise you they shall kill me before they shall make me king."

"Right, my son. Now embrace me; and you also, Charlotte, and don't forget me."

"Oh, no! never, never!" both the children exclaimed, throwing their arms round his neck.

"Good-by, my dear children. Take them away, Juxon; their tears would deprive me of the courage to die."

Juxon snatched the poor children from their father's arms, and gave them to those who had brought them. Behind them the doors were opened, and every one could enter. The king, seeing himself alone in the midst of a crowd of guards and inquisitive people who invaded the apartment, remembered that the Comte de la Fère was quite near, under the floor, not able to see him, and

still hoping. He feared lest the least noise should serve as a signal to Athos, who by resuming his task would betray himself. The king therefore continued motionless, and by his example kept those present quiet.

The king was not mistaken, Athos was actually beneath him. He listened; he despaired of hearing the signal; he sometimes in his impatience began to cut the stone afresh, but fearing to be heard, he immediately stopped. This horrible inaction lasted two hours. The silence of death reigned in the royal chamber.

Then Athos determined to seek the reason for this dumb tranquillity which the din of the crowd alone disturbed. He opened the hanging which hid the hole, and descended to the first stage of the scaffold. Scarcely four inches above his head was the flooring, which was extended at the level of the platform, and which made the scaffold. The noise which he had but indistinctly heard hitherto, but which at this moment met him in full force, made him leap with terror. He went to the edge of the scaffold, opened the black cloth, and saw cavalry ranged against the terrible machine; beyond these, ranks of halberdiers, beyond them musketeers, and still beyond these the first rows of the populace, who, like the gloomy ocean, were bubbling up and groaning.

"What has happened?" said Athos to himself, trembling more than the cloth, the plaits of which he was rumpling. "The people are pressing forward; the soldiers are under arms; and among the spectators, whose eyes are all fixed on the window, I see D'Artagnan. What is he staring at? Good heavens! have they let the executioner escape?"

All of a sudden the drums rolled discordant and gloomy; a sound of heavy and continuous footsteps was heard above his head. It seemed to him as though an

extended procession tramped across the floors of Whitehall; he soon heard the very planks of the scaffold creak. He cast a glance out on the open square, and the attitude of the spectators told what a last hope, still lingering in the depths of his heart, hitherto had prevented him from surmising.

The murmurs of the crowd entirely ceased. All eyes were fixed on the window of Whitehall; half-opened mouths and suspended breaths indicated the expectation of some terrible spectacle. The tramp of steps, which, from his position under the floor of the king's room, Athos had heard above his head, was reproduced on the scaffold, which bent under the weight so that the planks almost touched the head of the unfortunate gentleman. It was evidently two files of soldiers taking position. At the same instant a well-known and noble voice said above his head, "Colonel, I want to speak to the people."

Athos shuddered from head to foot; it was really the king who was speaking on the scaffold. In fact, after having drunk some wine and eaten a little bread, Charles, tired of awaiting death, had suddenly determined to take it by the forelock, and had given the signal to march.

Then the window had been opened wide, and the populace saw advancing in silence a man in a mask, whom from the axe in his hand they knew was the executioner. On approaching the block, he placed his axe upon it. This was the first sound that Athos understood.

Then behind the executioner, pale certainly, but calm, and walking with a firm step, came Charles between two clergymen, followed by some superior officers appointed to carry out the sentence, and escorted by two lines of halberdiers, who were drawn up on the two sides of the scaffold.

The sight of the masked man had called forth a prolonged clamor. Every one was curious to know who this

unknown executioner was who had offered himself just in time to enable the terrible spectacle to take place, when the people had thought that it was postponed until the next day. Though closely scanned, all that could be seen was a man of middle height, dressed entirely in black, who seemed to be of mature age, — for the end of a beard which was turning gray extended below the mask which covered his face.

But at the sight of the king so calm, noble, and dignified, silence was instantly re-established, so that each one could hear the wish which he expressed of speaking to the people.

To the request of the king to be allowed to speak, the one to whom it had been addressed had evidently assented, for in a firm and sonorous voice which vibrated to the bottom of Athos's heart, the king began to speak. He explained his conduct towards the people, and gave them advice for the welfare of England.

"Oh!" said Athos to himself, "is it indeed possible that I hear what I hear, and see what I see? Has God abandoned his representative on the earth so far as to let him die so miserably? And I have not seen him! I have not said 'Adieu!' to him."

A noise was heard which sounded as if the instrument of death had been moved on the block.

The king interrupted himself.

"Do not touch the axe," said he. And he resumed his speech where he had left it.

The speech being ended, an icy silence succeeded above the count's head. He put his hand to his forehead, down which trickled the drops of perspiration, although the air was frosty.

This silence indicated the final preparations. The king had directed a look full of pity upon the crowd; then detaching the Order which he wore, and which was the same

diamond star which the queen had sent him, he handed it to the priest who accompanied Juxon. Then he drew from his breast a small diamond cross. This also came from Queen Henrietta.

"Sir," said he, addressing the priest, "I shall keep this cross in my hand till the last moment; you will take it from me when I am dead."

"Yes, Sire," said a voice which Athos recognized as that of Aramis.

Then Charles, who till then had had his hat on, took it off; then one by one he undid all the buttons of his doublet, and took it off also; then, as it was cold, he asked for his dressing-gown, which was given him. All these preparations were made with an appalling self-possession. One might have thought that the king was going to his bed, and not to his coffin.

Lastly, lifting up his hair, "Will it inconvenience you?" he said to the executioner. "In that case it can be tied up with a string."

Charles accompanied these words with a look which seemed as if it would penetrate under the mask of the unknown. This look, so noble and calm, forced the man to turn away his head, but behind the penetrating look of the king he met the burning look of Aramis.

The king, seeing that he did not answer, repeated his question.

"It will be quite enough," said the man, in a hollow voice, "if you remove it from the neck."

The king separated his hair with his hands, and looking at the block, "The block seems very low," he said. "Would it not be better a little higher?"

"It is as usual," replied the masked man.

"Do you think you can cut off my head at a stroke?" asked the king.

"I hope so," answered the executioner.

There was in these three words, *I hope so*, such a strange intonation that every one shuddered except the king.

"That is right; and now, executioner, listen."

The masked man took a step towards the king, and leaned on his axe.

"I don't wish you to surprise me. I shall kneel down in prayer. Do not strike then."

"And when shall I?" asked the man.

"When I place my neck on the block and stretch forth my arms, saying, *Remember*, then strike boldly."

The masked man slightly bowed.

"The moment has come for leaving the world," said the king to those who were around him. "Gentlemen, I leave you in the midst of a storm, and precede you into that land which knows not storms. Farewell."

He looked at Aramis, and gave him a special sign by a movement of his head.

"Now," he continued, "go farther off and let me say my prayers, I beg of you. You also," he said to the man with a mask; "it is only for an instant, and I know I belong to you."

Then Charles knelt, made the sign of the cross, put his mouth close to the planks, as if he wished to kiss the platform, "Comte de la Fère," he said, in French, "are you there, and may I speak?"

This voice struck Athos full in the heart, and pierced him like steel.

"Yes, Majesty," said he, trembling.

"Faithful friend, generous heart, I cannot be saved; I did not deserve to be. I have spoken to men and to God, to thee I speak last of all. To support a cause which I have thought sacred I have lost the throne of my ancestors and my children's heritage. There remains a million in

gold, which I hid in the cellars of Newcastle when quitting that town. This money employ when you believe it will be most profitable for my eldest son; and now, Comte de la Fère, bid me adieu."

"Adieu, sacred and martyred Majesty," stammered Athos, frozen with terror.

There was a momentary silence, then in a full, sonorous voice which was heard not only on the scaffold, but also in the open square before it, the king said, "*Remember!*"

He had scarcely uttered the word before a terrible blow shook the scaffold; the dust was shaken from the drapery, and blinded the unfortunate gentleman beneath. Then suddenly, as if mechanically, Athos raised his head; a warm drop fell on his forehead. He drew back with a shudder, and at the same instant the drops became a black cascade, which gushed on the floor.

Athos had fallen on his knees, and remained for a while as if overcome with madness and loss of strength. Soon, by the decreasing noise, he knew that the crowd was moving away; he remained still for a time, motionless, dumb, and full of dismay. Then returning, he went and dipped the end of his handkerchief in the blood of the martyr-king; and as the crowd was growing less and less, he got down, opened the cloth, slipped between two horses, mixed among the people, whose dress he was wearing, and was the first to reach the inn.

He went to his room, looked at himself in the glass, saw his forehead marked by a large red spot, put up his hand, and drew it back covered with the blood of the king, and then fainted away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MAN IN THE MASK.

ALTHOUGH it was only four o'clock in the afternoon, it was quite dark; the snow was falling thick and icy. Aramis returned next, and found Athos, if not unconscious, at least crushed. At his friend's first words the count awoke as from a sort of lethargy into which he had fallen.

"Well," said Aramis, "conquered by fate!"

"Conquered!" said Athos. "Noble and unfortunate king!"

"Are you wounded?"

"No; it is his blood."

The count wiped his forehead.

"Where were you, then?"

"Where you left me, — under the scaffold."

"And you saw everything?"

"No, but I understood all. God preserve me from another such hour as that I have just passed! Is not my hair white?"

"Then you know that I did not leave him?"

"I heard your voice up to the last moment."

"See here the star and the cross which I took from his hand; he wished them to be restored to the queen."

"And here is a handkerchief in which to wrap them," and Athos drew from his pocket the handkerchief that he had dipped in the blood of the king. "And now," asked he, "what have they done with the poor corpse?"

"By Cromwell's order it will receive royal honors. We have placed the body in a lead coffin; the physicians are employed in embalming the remains, and this work finished, the king will lie in state."

"Mockery!" sullenly muttered Athos; "royal honors to him whom they have assassinated!"

"That proves that the king dies, but royalty does not."

"Alas!" said Athos, "he is perhaps the last knightly king whom the world will see."

"Come, do not distress yourself, Count," said a deep voice on the stairs, on which the heavy steps of Porthos were heard; "we are all mortal, my poor friends."

"You arrive late, my dear Porthos," said the count.

"Yes, there were some fellows on the way who delayed me. They were dancing, the wretches! I took one by the neck, and thought I would choke him a bit. Just at that moment a patrol came up. Happily he with whom I particularly had business was for some minutes without the power of speaking. I profited by this, and turned into a side street, and this led me into another still smaller. Then I lost my way. I don't know London; I don't know English. I thought I should never find my way again; however, here I am."

"But have you not seen D'Artagnan?" said Aramis; "and can anything have happened to him?"

"We were separated by the crowd," said Porthos; "and in spite of all my efforts I was not able to find him."

"Oh!" said Athos, with some bitterness, "*I* saw him; he was in the front rank of the crowd, in a good position to see the whole spectacle."

"Oh, Comte de la Fère," said a calm voice, though broken by want of breath through his haste, "is it really you who calumniate the absent?"

This reproach deeply affected Athos. However, as the impression produced by the sight of D'Artagnan in the front ranks of the senseless and ferocious crowd was very strong, he contented himself by replying, —

"I do not calumniate you, my friend. We felt disquieted about you, and I told them where you were. You did not know King Charles; he was only a stranger to you, and you were not drawn to love him," and he extended his hand to his friend. But D'Artagnan pretended not to see Athos's movement, and kept his hand under his cloak.

"*Ouf!* I am tired," said D'Artagnan, and sat down.

"Drink a glass of port," said Aramis, taking a bottle and filling a glass; "drink, that will set you up again."

"Yes, let us drink," said Athos, who saw the Gascon's displeasure, and wished to touch glasses with him, "and then leave this hateful country. The felucca is waiting, as you know. Let us start this evening; we have nothing more to do here."

"You are in a great hurry, Monsieur the Count," said D'Artagnan.

"This bloody soil scorches my feet," said Athos.

"The snow does not produce that effect on me," the Gascon said quietly.

"But what do you wish us to do, now that the king is dead?"

"So, Monsieur the Count," said D'Artagnan, carelessly, "you do not see that something remains to be done by us here?"

"Nothing, nothing," said Athos, "except to doubt the divine goodness and to mistrust one's own strength."

"Ah, well," said D'Artagnan; "I, mean wretch, sanguinary loiterer, who placed myself thirty feet from the scaffold to see the head of the king fall, whom I don't

know and to whom, as it appears, I was indifferent, — I think differently from the count. I shall stay."

Athos grew very pale; every one of his friend's reproaches penetrated to the depths of his heart.

"So you mean to stay in London?" said Porthos to D'Artagnan.

"Yes, do you?"

"Why, now," said Porthos, a little embarrassed in the presence of Athos and Aramis, "if you remain, as I came with you, I shall depart only with you; I shall not leave you by yourself in this hateful country."

"Thanks, my excellent friend. Then I have a small enterprise to propose, which we will put in execution together so soon as Monsieur the Count has gone; and the idea of it came into my head while I was looking at the spectacle."

"What is it?" said Porthos.

"It is to know who that man in the mask was who so obligingly offered to cut off the king's head."

"A man in a mask!" exclaimed Athos; "you have not let the executioner escape?"

"Oh, no," said D'Artagnan, "he is still in the cellar, where he has had, I expect, some acquaintance with our host's wine-bottles. But you make me think — "

He went to the door.

"Mousqueton!" said he.

"Monsieur?" replied a voice which seemed to come up from the depths of the earth.

"Let your prisoner go; all is over."

"But," said Athos, "who then was the wretch who raised his hand against his king?"

"An amateur executioner, who, for all that, wielded the axe with adroitness, for, *as he hoped*," said Aramis, "he needed to give but one blow."

"Did you not see his face?" Athos asked.

"No; he wore a mask," said D'Artagnan.

"But you who were quite near him, Aramis?"

"I saw only a beard partly gray, which fell below the mask."

"It was then a man of mature age?" asked Athos.

"Oh," said D'Artagnan, "that signifies nothing. When one puts on a mask one can easily put on a beard."

"I am sorry I did not follow him," said Porthos.

"Ah, well, my dear Porthos, that is just the idea that occurred to me," said D'Artagnan.

Athos understood it all now; he got up.

"Pardon me, D'Artagnan," he said. "I have doubted God; I was doubting you too. Pardon me, friend."

"We will see to that by-and-by," said D'Artagnan, with a half smile.

"Well," said Aramis.

"Well," resumed D'Artagnan, "while I was looking, not at the king, as the count thinks, — for I know what it means when a man is about to die, and although I ought by this time to be used to this kind of thing, I always feel badly, — but at the masked man, for I thought I should like to know who he was. Now, as we are in the habit of calling one another to our mutual help as one calls his second hand to the aid of the first, I looked round mechanically to see if Porthos were there, — for I had recognized you, Aramis, near the king, and you, Count, I knew would be under the scaffold. This thought makes me pardon you," he added, giving his hand to Athos, "for you must have suffered very acutely. I was looking around me, when I saw to my right a head which had been broken, and which, as well as possible, had been patched up with black silk. 'Hang it,' I said to myself; 'I fancy that I had a hand in sewing up that skull.' In

fact, it was that unfortunate Scot, Parry's brother, you know, — the one on whom Groslow was amused to put forth his strength, and who had no more than half a head when we fell in with him."

"Perfectly," said Porthos; "the man with the black fowls."

"That's right; he was making signs to another man who was to my left. I turned round and recognized honest Grimaud, quite engaged like myself in devouring with his eyes my masked headsman. 'Oh,' I uttered. Now, as that is an abbreviation which Monsieur the Count uses whenever he speaks to him, Grimaud considered he was the one called, and turned round as if moved by a spring. He at once recognized me; then pointing his finger towards the masked man, 'Hi!' said he, as if he meant to say, 'Have you observed?' 'Yes, indeed,' I responded. We had thoroughly understood each other. I then turned towards the Scot; his face, also, had a look of recognition. In short, all ended, you know how, in a very sad fashion. The people went away; by degrees evening drew on. I withdrew into a corner of the space before the palace with Grimaud and the Scot, to whom I had made a sign to stay with us, and I from that point looked at the executioner, who returned into the royal chamber and changed his dress; doubtless it was covered with blood. After this he put on a black hat, covered himself with his cloak, and disappeared. I guessed he was going away, and ran in front of the door. In fact, a few minutes after we saw him come down the staircase."

"You followed him?" exclaimed Athos.

"Rather! but not without trouble, I can tell you. Every moment he kept turning; then we were obliged to hide or to assume an air of indifference. I should have

killed him; but I am not selfish, and it was a feast which I was preparing for you, Aramis and Athos, to console you a little. At length, after half-an-hour spent in crossing the most crooked streets of the city, he reached a small, isolated house, where not a sound nor a light told of the presence of man.

"Grimaud drew forth a pistol.

"'Hi?' said he, pointing him out.

"'No,' I said, and I held his arm. I have told you I had my idea. The masked man stopped before a low door, and took out a key; but before putting it into the lock, he turned round to see if he had been followed. I was hiding behind a tree, Grimaud behind a stone post; the Scot, who had nothing to hide behind, threw himself flat on the street. Without doubt he whom we were pursuing thought himself alone, for I heard the creaking of the key; the door opened, and he disappeared."

"The wretch!" said Aramis, "while you have returned he will have escaped, and we shall not discover him."

"Come now, Aramis, you take me for some one else," said D'Artagnan.

"Yet," said Athos, "in your absence —"

"Well, in my absence had I not Grimaud and the Scot to take my place? Before he had time to take ten steps inside the house, I had made the circuit of it. At the door by which he entered I stationed the Scot, telling him that if the man in the mask went out he must follow him, while Grimaud would himself follow him, and would return to await us where we were. In short, I have placed Grimaud as the second spy, and here I am. The beast is surrounded; now, who wants to see the capture?"

Athos threw himself into the arms of D'Artagnan, who was wiping his forehead.

"Friend," said he, "truly, you have been too good to pardon me. I was wrong, a hundred times wrong, for I ought to know you; but there is at the bottom of us something wicked which doubts constantly."

"Hm!" said Porthos; "was it perchance Cromwell who was the executioner, to make sure that the task should be well done?"

"How so? M. Cromwell is fat and short; and this man slim, and rather tall than short."

"Some condemned soldier to whom pardon was offered at that price," said Athos, "as was done in the case of the unhappy Chalais."

"No, no," continued D'Artagnan; "it was not the measured step of a foot-soldier, nor was it either the straddling step of a horse-soldier. There was a fine leg and a distinguished bearing. Either I am much deceived, or we have to do with a gentleman in this."

"A gentleman!" exclaimed Athos, "impossible! it would be a dishonor to the whole class."

"A pretty chase," said Porthos, with a laugh which made the panes of glass shake, — "a pretty chase, I declare."

"Do you mean to go off now, Athos?" asked D'Artagnan.

"No, I shall stay," replied the gentleman, with a menace which promised no good for him to whom it referred.

"Then our swords," said Aramis, "don't let us lose an instant."

The four friends quickly put on their own clothes, girt on their swords, called up Mousqueton and Blaisois, and ordered them to pay the bill at the inn and to have everything ready for their departure, the probability being that they would leave London the same night.

The gloom had grown deeper; the snow continued falling, and looked like a vast winding-sheet stretched out over the regicide city. It was nearly seven; scarcely a passer-by was to be seen, — all were talking over their fires in low voices of the terrible events of that day.

The four friends, wrapped up in their cloaks, went along the streets and squares so frequented by day and so deserted this night. D'Artagnan acted as guide, trying to recognize from time to time the crosses that he had made with his poniard on the walls; but the night was so dark that these indications could scarcely be recognized. However, D'Artagnan had so fixed in his mind the various signs, posts, and fountains, that after half-an-hour's walk the four came in sight of the lonely house.

D'Artagnan for a moment thought Parry's brother had disappeared. He was mistaken. The sturdy Scot, accustomed to the frosts of his mountains, was leaning against a post, and like a statue thrown from its base, insensible to the inclemency of the weather, was all covered with snow; but at the approach of the four men he stood up.

"Come," said Athos, "here is another good servant; thank goodness, brave men are less rare than one thinks, — that 's encouraging."

"Don't be in a hurry to weave garlands for our Scot," said D'Artagnan; "I believe the fellow is here on his own account. I have heard it said that those who have been born north of the Tweed are very revengeful. Let M. Groslow look out! he would pass an unpleasant quarter of an hour if he fell in with him."

"Well?" said Athos, in English.

"No one has come out," said Parry's brother.

"Well, stay with this man, Porthos and Aramis, will you? D'Artagnan will take me to Grimaud."

Grimaud, not less clever than the Scot, was closely wedged in a hollow willow-tree, of which he had made a sentry-box. For a moment D'Artagnan feared, as in the case of the other sentinel, that the masked man had gone, and that Grimaud had followed him. Presently a head appeared, and gave a slight whistle.

"Oh!" said Athos.

"Yes," replied Grimaud.

They came up to the willow-tree.

"Well," asked D'Artagnan, "has any one gone out?"

"No, but some one has gone in."

"A man or a woman."

"A man."

"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan; "then there are two."

"I wish there were four," said Athos; "the sides at least would be equal."

"Perhaps there are four."

"How can that be?"

"Other men might have been in the house before them, and waiting for them."

"We can see," said Grimaud, pointing to a window, through the shutters of which filtered some rays of light.

"That's true," said D'Artagnan; "let us call the others," and they went round the house to signal Porthos and Aramis to come. They came in great haste.

"Have you seen anything?" they asked.

"No; but we are going to see," replied D'Artagnan, pointing to Grimaud, who, by catching on the roughnesses of the wall, had already raised himself five or six feet from the ground.

All four drew closer. Grimaud continued his ascent with the agility of a cat. At last he succeeded in seizing one of the hooks which serve to hold back the shutters when they are open; at the same time his foot found a

moulding which furnished him sufficient support, for he made a sign indicating that he had gained his end. Then he applied his eye to the crack in the shutter.

"Well?" asked D'Artagnan.

Grimaud held up his hand closed all but two fingers.

"Speak," said Athos, "we cannot see your signs. How many are there?"

"Two," said he, with a great effort; "one is facing me, the other has his back towards me."

"Well, and who is he facing you?"

"The man whom I saw pass."

"Do you know him?"

"I think I recognize him, and I am not mistaken, — fat and short."

"Who is it?" asked the four, in a low voice.

"General Oliver Cromwell."

"And the other?"

"Thin and slender."

"That's the executioner," said D'Artagnan and Aramis at once.

"I see only his back," replied Grimaud; "but wait — now he is moving; he is turning round; and if he would take off his mask I should be able to see him — ah!"

Grimaud, as if struck to the heart, let go the iron hasp and threw himself back, uttering a low groan. Porthos caught him in his arms.

"Did you see him?" they asked.

"Yes," said Grimaud, with his hair on end and perspiration on his brow.

"The executioner, in fact?" said Aramis.

"Yes."

"And who is it?" said Porthos.

"He! he!" stammered Grimaud, pale as death, and seizing with trembling hands the hand of his master.

"What, *he?*"

"Mordaunt!" replied Grimaud.

D'Artagnan, Aramis, and Porthos uttered exclamations of joy. Athos took a step backwards, and passed his hand across his forehead.

"Fatality!" he murmured.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CROMWELL'S HOUSE.

It was really Mordaunt whom D'Artagnan had followed, but without recognizing him.

On entering the house, he had taken off the mask, removed the gray beard which he had worn for a disguise, and then gone upstairs and entered a room hung with dark-colored hangings, and was in the presence of a man seated at a bureau writing. It was Cromwell.

Cromwell had in London, as is well known, two or three of these retreats unknown even to most of his friends, the secret being only intrusted to those most intimate with him. Mordaunt could be counted in this latter class.

When he entered, Cromwell raised his head.

"Is it you, Mordaunt? You come late."

"General," he replied, "I wanted to see the very last of the ceremony; that has kept me."

"Ah!" said Cromwell, "I did not believe that ordinarily you were so inquisitive as that."

"I am always inquisitive to see the fall of one of your Highness's enemies; and he was not to be reckoned one of the least of them. But were not you, General, at Whitehall?"

"No," said Cromwell.

There was a momentary silence.

"Have you heard the details?"

"No; I have been here since the morning. I only know that there was a plot for rescuing the king."

"Ah, you knew that?"

"It was of little consequence. Four men disguised as workmen aimed at getting the king from prison, and taking him to Greenwich, where a ship was waiting."

"And knowing all that, your Highness remained here, far from the city, calm and inactive?"

"Calm, yes; but who told you I was inactive?"

"But suppose the plot had succeeded?"

"I wish it had."

"I thought your Highness regarded Charles I.'s death as a misfortune necessary for England's welfare?"

"Well," said Cromwell, "that was always my opinion. But provided he died, that was all that was necessary. It would have been better that it should not have been on a scaffold."

"Why so, your Highness?"

Cromwell smiled.

"I beg pardon," said Mordaunt; "but you know, General, that I am a political apprentice, and wish to profit on all occasions from the lessons which my master may please to give me."

"Because it would have been said that while I had justly condemned him, I had allowed him to escape from pity."

"But if he had actually escaped?"

"Impossible; my precautions were taken."

"And does your Highness know the four men who had undertaken this enterprise of saving the king?"

"They are four Frenchmen, two of whom were sent by Madame Henrietta to her husband, and two by Mazarin to me."

"And do you believe, sir, that Mazarin commissioned them to do what they have done?"

"It 's possible; but he will not acknowledge it."

"Why not?"

"Because they have been foiled in their object."

"Your Highness gave me two of those Frenchmen when they were guilty only of having borne arms for Charles's cause. But now they are guilty of plotting against England, is your Highness willing to give me all four of them?"

"Take them," said Cromwell.

Mordaunt bowed with a smile of triumphant ferocity.

"But," said Cromwell, seeing that Mordaunt was preparing to thank him, "let us return, if you please, to the unfortunate Charles. Were there many cries among the people?"

"Very few, except the cry, 'Long live Cromwell!'"

"Where were you standing?"

Mordaunt looked at the general for a moment to try and read in his eyes whether the question was from curiosity, or whether he knew all about it. But Mordaunt's keen look could not penetrate the dark depths of Cromwell's face.

"I was so placed that I could see and hear everything."

It was now Cromwell's turn to look hard at Mordaunt, and for the latter to become impenetrable. After a few seconds spent in examination, he turned away his eyes with indifference.

"It appears," said Cromwell, "that the improvised executioner did his duty well. The stroke, at least from what I am told, was applied by the hand of a master."

Mordaunt recalled what Cromwell had said, — that he knew no details; but he was now convinced that the general had been present, hidden behind some curtain or blind.

"In fact," said Mordaunt, with a calm voice and emotionless countenance, "one blow sufficed."

"Perhaps he was a man of that craft."

"Do you believe it, sir?"

"Why not?"

"The man had not the look of an executioner."

"And who but an executioner would have wished to practise that frightful occupation?"

"But," said Mordaunt, "perhaps it was some personal enemy of King Charles, who had vowed vengeance against him; or perhaps some gentleman who had grave reasons for hating the fallen king, and thus opposed him with axe in hand and masked face, not as the executioner's substitute, but as the minister of fate."

"It is possible."

"And if that were so, would your Highness condemn his act?"

"It is not for me to judge," said Cromwell. "It lies between him and God."

"But suppose your Highness knew this gentleman?"

"But I don't know him, sir, and don't wish to. As soon as Charles was condemned, it was not a man who beheaded him, but an axe."

"And yet, but for this man the king would have been saved."

Cromwell smiled.

"Without doubt; you have said so yourself, — they would have taken him away."

"They would have taken him away, but only as far as Greenwich. There he would have embarked on the felucca with his four deliverers; but on it were four of my men and five barrels of powder. At sea the men would enter the boat, and you are already too clever a politician, Mordaunt, to need the rest to be told you."

"Yes, out at sea they would all have been blown up."

"Exactly. The explosion would have done what the

axe had not. King Charles would have entirely disappeared. It would have been said that he escaped human justice, and had been overtaken by divine vengeance. All this your masked gentleman has caused me to lose, Mordaunt. You see clearly that I had my reasons for not wishing to know him, for in truth, in spite of his excellent intentions, I can hardly feel grateful for what he has done."

"Sir, as is always the case, I bend in humility before you; you are a profound thinker, and your idea of the mined felucca is sublime."

"Absurd," said Cromwell, "since it has become useless. There is no idea sublime in politics except one which bears its fruits. Every abortive idea is foolish and barren. You will go then this evening to Greenwich," continued Cromwell, getting up; "ask for the skipper of the 'Lightning.' You will show him a white handkerchief knotted at the corners; that is the sign agreed upon. You will tell the men to land, and send back the powder to the Arsenal, unless —"

"'Unless' —" replied Mordaunt, whose face was lighted up by a savage joy while Cromwell was speaking.

"Unless that felucca might be useful for your own private ends."

"Ah, my Lord!" exclaimed Mordaunt; "God, when making you his elected one, gave you a look which nothing can escape."

"I think that you call me my Lord!" said Cromwell, laughing. "That is well enough, as we are alone; but you must pay attention that no such word escapes you before our imbecile Puritans."

"Is it not thus that your Honor will soon be called?"

"I hope so, at least," said Cromwell; "but it is not yet time."

Cromwell rose, and took his cloak.

"You are going, sir?" asked Mordaunt.

"Yes," said Cromwell. "I slept here last night and the night before; and you know it is not my practice to sleep three nights in the same bed."

"So then your Highness gives me full liberty for to-night?"

"And even for the day to-morrow, if necessary," said Cromwell. "Since last night," added he, smiling, "you have done enough for my service; and if you have some personal affairs to arrange, it is just that I should give you your time."

"Thanks, sir; it will be well employed, I hope."

Cromwell made an inclination of the head; then turning round, "Are you armed?" he asked.

"I have my sword."

"And is any one waiting for you at the door?"

"No."

"Then you had better come with me, Mordaunt."

"Thanks, sir; the windings that you have to make by the subterranean passage would take me too long. I will go out by the other door."

"Go, then," said Cromwell.

And putting his hand on a concealed button, he opened a door so well-hidden in the tapestry that it was impossible for the most practised eye to notice it. This door, moved by a steel spring, closed behind him. It was one of those secret exits which, as history informs us, existed in all the mysterious houses in which Cromwell stayed.

The secret way passed under the lonely street, and opened out into a grotto in the garden of another house, situated about a hundred yards from that which the future Protector had just left.

It was during the last part of this scene that Grimaud had perceived, through the aperture of the shutter, two men, and had recognized them successively as Cromwell and Mordaunt. We have seen the effect that this produced. D'Artagnan was the first to recover the full use of his faculties.

"Mordaunt!" said he; "oh, by heavens! it is God himself who has put him in our way."

"Yes," said Porthos, "let us burst open the door and fall on him."

"On the contrary," said D'Artagnan, "let us burst open nothing. Make no noise, — *that* calls people; for if he is, as Grimaud says, with his worthy master, he may have some of his Ironsides lying hidden not far off. Holloa, Grimaud, come here and try to stand on your legs."

Grimaud came near. Although his rage returned with his consciousness, he was firm on his legs.

"Well," continued D'Artagnan. "Now climb up to the balcony again, and tell us if Mordaunt is still in company, if he makes ready to go out or to go to bed. If he is in company we will wait till he shall be alone; if he is going out, we will catch him at the door; if he remains there, we will break open the window. It is much less noisy and difficult than forcing a door."

Grimaud began making his silent ascent to the window.

"Guard the other way out, Athos and Aramis; we will stay here with Porthos."

The two friends obeyed.

"Well, Grimaud?"

"He is alone."

"Are you quite sure of it?"

"Yes."

"We have not seen his companion go out."

"Perhaps he went out by the other door."

"What is he doing?"

"He is putting on his cloak and gloves."

"Now it 's our turn!" muttered D'Artagnan.

Porthos put his hand to his poniard, which he drew forth mechanically from its sheath.

"Put it back, friend Porthos," said D'Artagnan. "To strike first is by no means the question. Let us proceed in order. We have some mutual explanations to make, and this is a sequence to the scene at Armentières. We only hope that this fellow has no offspring; and that if we destroy him, all will be destroyed with him."

"*Chut!*" said Grimaud; "he is preparing to go. He approaches the lamp. He puts it out. I see nothing more."

"Come down, then; come down!"

Grimaud jumped backwards, and alighted on his feet. The snow deadened the sound.

"Go and tell Athos and Aramis to station themselves on each side of the door, as Porthos and I are doing here; let them clap their hands if they get hold of him, and we will do the same."

Grimaud disappeared.

"Porthos, hide your huge shoulders better, dear friend; he must come out without seeing anything."

Porthos pressed close against the wall. D'Artagnan did the same. Then Mordaunt's steps were heard on the creaking staircase. An unseen door grated on its hinges. Mordaunt looked out, but saw nothing. Then he introduced the key into the lock; the door opened, and he appeared on the doorstep. At the same moment he found himself facing D'Artagnan. He endeavored to close the door. Porthos made a dash at the handle and threw it wide open, giving at the same time three claps with his hands. Athos and Aramis ran up.

Mordaunt became livid, but made no cry, nor did he call out for help. D'Artagnan went up to Mordaunt, and pushing him made him go backwards up the staircase, which was lighted by a lamp, enabling the Gascon to see Mordaunt's hands; but Mordaunt felt sure that if he killed D'Artagnan three others would remain to be got rid of. He therefore made no attempt at defence, nor used any threat. On reaching the door, Mordaunt felt himself brought to a stand. He doubtless thought that all would be over with him then; but he was wrong, — D'Artagnan put out his hand and opened the door. Porthos entered behind him; he had unhooked the lamp from the ceiling, and by its aid he lit the other. Athos and Aramis appeared, and then locked the door.

"Take the trouble to sit down," said D'Artagnan, offering a seat to the young man.

The latter took the chair, and seated himself, pale but calm. A little way off the three seated themselves. Athos took his seat in the farthest corner of the room, as if he wished to be a quiet spectator only of what was to go on. Porthos seated himself at the left, and Aramis at the right of D'Artagnan. Athos seemed much depressed. Porthos was rubbing his hands together with a feverish impatience. Aramis, though smiling, bit his lips till they bled. D'Artagnan alone kept calm, at least in appearance.

"M. Mordaunt," said the last, "since, after losing so many days in running after one another, chance at last brings us together, let us have some conversation, if you please."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CONVERSATION.

Mordaunt had been surprised so unexpectedly, he had ascended the stairs under the influence of feelings still so confused, that his power of reflection had not been regained.

What was real was that his first feeling had been entirely the surprise and the invincible terror which seizes every man whose mortal enemy, superior in force, grasps his arm at the very moment when he believes that enemy in another place, and occupied with other cares. But once seated, from the moment that he perceived a respite was accorded him, no matter for what purpose, he concentrated all his ideas, and recalled all his powers. The fiery look of D'Artagnan, instead of intimidating, electrified him, so to speak ; for this fiercely threatening look which he threw upon him was frank in its hate and its anger. Mordaunt, ready to seize every occasion offered him to extricate himself, either by force or by cunning, gathered himself up as does the bear hemmed in in his den, who follows with an eye apparently motionless every gesture of the hunter who has tracked him. Nevertheless, Mordaunt's eye by a rapid movement glanced at the long and strong sword hanging at his hip ; he placed unaffectedly his left hand on its hilt, brought it within reach of his right hand, and seated himself, as D'Artagnan had requested. The latter was waiting doubtless some aggressive word to begin one of those mocking or terrible

conversations which he sustained so well. Aramis said to himself, "We are going to hear some banalities." Porthos was biting his mustache, muttering, "Here's a deal of ceremony in crushing this young serpent!" Athos shrunk into the corner of the room, immovable and pale as a marble bas-relief, and feeling, despite his immovability, his forehead grow moist with perspiration. Mordaunt said nothing; only when he was well-assured that his sword was ready for use, he coolly crossed his legs, and waited.

The silence could not be prolonged much more without becoming ridiculous. This D'Artagnan felt; and as he had invited Mordaunt to sit down for a *talk*, he thought he ought to begin it.

"It seems to me, Monsieur," said he, with his freezing politeness, "that you change your dress almost as rapidly as I have seen the Italian pantomimists whom M. le Cardinal Mazarin brought from Bergamo, and whom he has no doubt taken you to see during your journey to France."

Mordaunt said nothing.

"Just now," continued D'Artagnan, "you were disguised, I mean dressed, as an assassin, and now —"

"And now, on the contrary, I have all the appearance of a man who is going to be assassinated, — is it not so?" replied Mordaunt, in his calm, quick voice.

"Oh, Monsieur!" replied D'Artagnan, "how can you say such things when you are in the company of gentlemen, and have so good a sword by your side?"

"There is no sword so good, Monsieur, as to balance four swords and four poniards, without counting those of your acolytes outside."

"Pardon, sir," replied D'Artagnan, "you are mistaken. Those who await us at the door are not our acolytes, but

our servants; I hold to re-establishing things on their most scrupulous truth."

Mordaunt only replied by a smile which ironically curled his lips.

"But this is not the question," continued D'Artagnan; "and I return to my inquiry. I do myself the honor of asking why you have changed your dress? The mask, it seems to me, fitted you well enough; the gray beard suited you wonderfully; and as for the axe with which you gave such an illustrious stroke, it would not be unbecoming to you at this moment. Why, then, have you divested yourself of them?"

"Because, when recalling the scene at Armentières, I thought I should find four axes instead of one, since I was going to meet four executioners."

"Monsieur," replied D'Artagnan, quite calmly, although a slight knitting of the eyebrows showed that he was beginning to grow warm, — "Monsieur, although profoundly vicious and corrupt, you are excessively young, for which reason I will not dwell on your frivolous remarks. Yes, frivolous, for what you have just said about Armentières has not the least relation with the present situation. In fact, we were not able to offer a sword to Madame your mother, and beg of her to use it against ourselves; but as for you, a young cavalier who employs the poniard and pistol as we have seen you do, and who wears a sword of the size of yours, there is no one who has not the right to ask the favor of a meeting with you."

"Ah, ah!" said Mordaunt, "you wish then, to fight a duel?" and he got up with flashing eye, as if disposed at once to accept the challenge. Porthos rose also, ready as ever for such adventures.

"Pardon me," said D'Artagnan, with the same coldness;

"don't let us hurry, for each of us should desire that things should be arranged according to all the rules. Seat yourself, then, dear Porthos, and you, M. Mordaunt, be pleased to remain quiet. We are going to carry on this affair in the best way, and I am going to be frank with you. Confess, now, that you have a great desire to kill one or more of us."

"One and all of you!"

D'Artagnan turned towards Aramis and said to him, —

"It is a great happiness, is it not, dear Aramis, that M. Mordaunt knows so well the intricacies of the French language? We shall thus be sure to have no misunderstanding between us, and can arrange everything marvellously well."

Then D'Artagnan turned towards Mordaunt and continued, "Dear M. Mordaunt, these gentlemen reciprocate your good feeling towards them, and would be delighted to kill you also. I will say further that they probably *will* kill you. At any rate it will be as loyal gentlemen; and the best proof I can give you is *this*."

Saying this, D'Artagnan threw his hat on the carpet, pushed his chair back against the wall, made a sign to his friends to do the same, and bowing to Mordaunt with a grace quite French, "At your service, Monsieur," he continued, "for if you have nothing to object to the honor which I claim, *I* will begin, if you please. My sword is shorter than yours; but, bah! I hope my arm will make up for it."

"Halt!" said Porthos, stepping forward; "I will begin, and without fine speeches."

"Allow me, Porthos," said Aramis.

Athos did not move. He seemed like a statue; even his breathing seemed to have stopped.

"Messieurs," said D'Artagnan, "be quiet. You shall

have your turn. Regard then the eyes of Monsieur, and read there the happy hatred with which we inspire him. See how skilfully he has drawn his sword; admire with what circumspection he looks all around him to find any obstacle which may prevent him from breaking. Well! does not all that prove to you that M. Mordaunt is a fine swordsman, and that you will succeed me in a little while, provided I let him do it? Remain, then, in your places like Athos, whose calm I cannot too much recommend to you, and leave me the initiative, which I have taken. Besides," continued he, drawing his sword with a terrible gesture, "I have particularly an affair with Monsieur, and I will begin. I desire it; I wish it."

It was the first time that D'Artagnan, in this affair, had expressed himself so decidedly to his friends. Up to this time he had contented himself with thinking it. Porthos drew back; Aramis put his sword under his arm; Athos remained immovable in the obscure corner where he was, not calm, as D'Artagnan said, but suffocated and panting.

"Put your sword into its scabbard, Chevalier," said D'Artagnan to Aramis. "Monsieur might believe in intentions which you do not have."

Then turning towards Mordaunt, "Monsieur," he said to him, "I am awaiting you."

"And I wonder at you, Messieurs. You discuss who shall begin the combat, and do not consult *me* on that point. I hate you all four, it is true, but in different degrees. I hope to kill all four of you; but I have more chance to kill the first than the second, the second than the third, the third than the last. I claim the right therefore of choosing my adversary. If you deny me this right, kill me, I will not fight."

The four friends looked at one another.

"That 's just," said Porthos and Aramis, who hoped the choice would fall on them. Athos and D'Artagnan said nothing; but their silence gave consent.

"Well!" said Mordaunt in the midst of a profound, solemn silence which reigned in this mysterious house; "I choose for my first opponent him who, no longer deeming himself worthy to be called the Comte de la Fère, is called Athos."

Athos rose from his seat as if a spring had brought him to his feet; but to the great astonishment of his friends, after a moment's silence and immobility he said, shaking his head, "M. Mordaunt, any duel between us is impossible; give to some one else the honor you intend for me."

And he sat down again.

"Ah!" said Mordaunt, "there is one already who is afraid."

"A thousand thunders!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, making a stride towards the young man, "who dares say that Athos is afraid?"

"Let him say it, D'Artagnan," replied Athos, with a smile full of sadness and contempt.

"It is your decision, Athos?" replied the Gascon.

"Irrevocable."

"It is well; we will not speak of it further."

Then turning towards Mordaunt, "You have understood it," said he. "M. le Comte de la Fère does not wish to do you the honor of fighting with you. Choose one of us to replace him."

"Now that I cannot fight with him, it matters little to me which it is. Put your names into a hat, and I will draw one."

"That 's a good idea," said D'Artagnan.

"In fact, that settles all the difficulty," said Aramis.

"I should never have thought of that," said Porthos; "and yet it is very simple."

"Come, Aramis," said D'Artagnan, "write the names for us in that pretty little writing with which you wrote to Marie Michon to tell her that Monsieur's mother was plotting the assassination of my Lord Buckingham."

Mordaunt bore this fresh sarcasm without frowning. He was standing, his arms crossed, and seemed as calm as a man can be in such circumstances. If it was not courage, it was at least pride, which resembles it much.

Aramis went to Cromwell's desk, tore three pieces of paper of equal size, wrote the names of the three friends on them, and handed them open to Mordaunt, who, without reading them, made a sign which meant that he left it entirely to him. Then having rolled them up, Aramis put them into a hat, and presented them to the young man.

The latter put his hand into the hat, and took up one of the papers, which he scornfully dropped without reading it on the table.

"Ah, viper!" muttered D'Artagnan. "I will give all the odds in favor of my captaincy in the Musketeers that that paper bears my name!"

Aramis opened the paper; but however calm and cool he affected to be, one could see that his voice trembled from hate and desire.

"D'Artagnan!" he read in a loud voice.

D'Artagnan uttered a cry of joy.

"Ah," said he; "there is then justice in heaven!"

"I hope, Monsieur," said he, turning towards Mordaunt, "that you have no objection to make."

"None, Monsieur," said Mordaunt, drawing his sword, and resting the point on his boot.

As soon as D'Artagnan was sure that his desire was satisfied, and that his man would not escape him, he re-

sumed all his tranquillity, and even all the slowness which he used when preparing for that serious matter called a duel. He pulled up neatly his ruffles, and rubbed the sole of his boot on the floor, which did not prevent him from noticing that for the second time Mordaunt looked around him with a strange look, which he had once already intercepted.

"Are you ready, Monsieur?" said D'Artagnan, at last.

"It is I who await you, Monsieur," replied Mordaunt, lifting his head and regarding D'Artagnan with a look whose expression it would be impossible to describe.

"Then take care of yourself, Monsieur," said the Gascon, "for I fence tolerably well."

"And I also," said Mordaunt.

"So much the better; that quiets my conscience. On guard!"

"One moment," said the young man. "Give me your word, Messieurs, that you will only attack me one after the other."

"Is it for the pleasure of insulting us that you ask that, you little viper!" said Porthos.

"No; but to have, as Monsieur said just now, a clear conscience."

"It must be for something else," muttered D'Artagnan, shaking his head, and looking around him with a certain inquietude.

"Upon our honor," said Aramis and Porthos, together.

"In that case, Messieurs, put yourselves in some corner, as M. le Comte de la Fère has done, who, if he does not wish to fight, appears to me to know the rules of combat; and give us some space. We shall need it soon."

"Very well," said Aramis.

"He makes plenty of difficulties," said Porthos.

"Do as he wishes, Messieurs," said D'Artagnan; "we

must not give Monsieur the least pretext for behaving badly, of which, it seems to me, saving the respect which I owe him, he has a great desire."

This fresh raillery made no impression on Mordaunt's impassible face. Porthos and Aramis took the opposite corner to that where Athos was, so that the two champions had the middle of the room; that is, in the full light which the two lamps placed on Cromwell's desk afforded.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, "are you at last ready, Monsieur?"

"I am ready," said Mordaunt.

The two then made a step forward; and thanks to this single and similar movement, their swords were engaged.

D'Artagnan was too distinguished a swordsman to amuse himself by feeling his adversary, as they say in the fencing-school. He made a brilliant, rapid feint, which was parried by Mordaunt.

"Ah, ah!" he exclaimed, with a smile of satisfaction; and without losing any time, thinking he saw an opening, he struck a forward stroke, rapid and blazing like lightning.

Mordaunt parried by a stroke of *quarte* so close that it would not have gone out of a lady's ring.

"I am beginning to think that we are going to amuse ourselves."

"Yes," muttered Aramis; "but while doing so, play close."

"Hang it, my friend, pay attention!" said Porthos.

Mordaunt smiled in his turn.

"Ah, Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "what a horrid smile you have! It must be the Devil who taught it you, must it not?"

Mordaunt's only reply was by trying to hold down

D'Artagnan's sword with a force that the Gascon did not expect to find in a frame apparently so weak; but thanks to a parry not less skilful than that just executed by his adversary, he met Mordaunt's sword in time, which slipped along D'Artagnan's without touching his breast.

Mordaunt rapidly took a step back. "Ah! you break;" said D'Artagnan, "you turn! As you please, I even gain something by it; I see no longer your wicked smile. Here I am entirely in the shade; so much the better. You have no idea how false a look you have, Monsieur, especially when you are afraid. Look a little at my eyes, and you will see a thing that your mirror will never show you; that is, a loyal and frank look."

Mordaunt, to this flow of words, which was not perhaps in very good taste, but which was habitual to D'Artagnan, whose tactics were to preoccupy his adversary, did not reply a single word; but he broke, and turning always, he succeeded thus in changing places with D'Artagnan. He kept smiling more and more. This began to disquiet the Gascon.

"Come, come!" said he, "this must end. The fool has thighs of iron; to the front with slashing strokes."

He now pressed Mordaunt hard, who continued to break away, but clearly for tactical purposes, without making a mistake from which D'Artagnan could profit, or letting his sword swerve an instant from the line. Yet, as the combat was going on in a room and the space was scanty, Mordaunt's foot soon touched the wall, on which he rested his left hand.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "you shall not break away this time, my dear friend! Messieurs," he added, tightening his lips and frowning, "have you ever seen a scorpion nailed to a wall? No? Well, you are going to see it."

And in a second he let fly three terrible blows at Mor-

daunt. All three touched him, but only to graze him. D'Artagnan did not at all understand this power. The three friends looked on panting and perspiring. At last D'Artagnan, being engaged too closely, took a step back to prepare a fourth stroke, or rather to execute it, — for in his case arms were like chess, a vast combination, the parts of which interlaced one another. But just when, after a rapid and close feint, he was attacking swift as lightning, the wall seemed to divide. Mordaunt disappeared by the gaping opening; and D'Artagnan's sword, caught between the two panels, broke like so much glass. D'Artagnan took a step backwards. The wall again closed.

Mordaunt had manœuvred while defending himself so as to have his back against the secret door by which we saw Cromwell pass out. When there, he had with the left hand sought for and pressed the button; he had then disappeared as those evil spirits at the theatre disappear who have the power of passing through walls.

The Gascon uttered a furious imprecation, to which, from the other side of the iron panel, a savage laugh replied, — an ominous laugh which sent a shiver into the veins of the sceptical Aramis.

"Help here, Messieurs! let us break open this door."

"It is the demon in person," said Aramis, hastening at the call of his friend.

"He has escaped us! he has escaped us!" bawled Porthos, while pressing his huge shoulder against the partition, which, fastened by some secret spring, did not move.

"So much the better," Athos murmured.

"I was suspicious of it, *mordioux!*" said D'Artagnan, spending himself in vain efforts, — "I was suspicious of it. When the rascal turned round the room, I expected some infamous manœuvre; but who could have suspected that?"

"It is a frightful misfortune which his friend the Devil sends us!" exclaimed Aramis.

"It 's a manifest happiness which God sends us!" said Athos, with evident joy.

"Truly," replied D'Artagnan, shrugging his shoulders and going away from the door, which could not be opened, "you deteriorate, Athos! How could you say such things to people like us, *mordioux!* You do not comprehend, then, the situation?"

"What, then? what situation?" asked Porthos.

"At this game here, who ever does not kill is killed," replied D'Artagnan. "Come now, my dear fellow, does it enter into your expiatory Jeremiads that M. Mordaunt should sacrifice us to his filial piety? If it is your opinion, say it frankly."

"Oh, D'Artagnan, my friend!"

"It is truly a pity to see things from this point of view! The wretch is about sending a hundred Ironsides," said D'Artagnan, "who will pound us like grain in M. Cromwell's mortar. Come, come, let us be off; if we stay here five minutes only, it is all over with us."

"Yes, you are right; let us be off!" replied Athos and Aramis.

"And where are we going?" demanded Porthos.

"To the inn, dear friend, to take our things and our horses; then from there, so it please God, to France, where, at least, I know the construction of the houses. Our ship awaits us; upon my word, that 's lucky."

And D'Artagnan, adding example to precept, put the stump of his sword into its sheath, put on his hat, opened the door, and rapidly went downstairs, followed by his companions. At the door the fugitives found their servants, and asked news of Mordaunt, but they had not seen any one leave the house.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE "LIGHTNING" FELUCCA.

D'Artagnan had guessed rightly; Mordaunt had no time to lose, and had not lost any. He knew how rapidly his enemies decided and acted; he resolved, therefore, to act similarly. This time the musketeers had found an adversary worthy of them.

After having carefully closed the door behind him, Mordaunt slipped into the subterranean passage, and gaining the neighboring house, he stopped to examine himself and take breath.

"Capital!" said he; "scarcely anything, — a few scratches, that 's all; two on the arm, one on the chest. The wounds *I* make are more serious! Let them ask the executioner of Béthune, my uncle Winter, and King Charles! Now there is not a second to lose, for a second lost perhaps saves them; and they all four must die together with a single blow, destroyed by the thunder of man in default of that of God. They must disappear broken, crushed, scattered. Let me run then until my legs can carry me no longer, until my heart swells in my breast; but let me arrive before them;" and Mordaunt started at a rapid pace towards the nearest cavalry barracks, distant about a quarter of a league. He did it in five minutes.

On reaching them, he made known who he was, took the best horse from the stables, and in a quarter of an hour was at Greenwich.

"There's the port, that dark point over there; it's the Isle of Dogs. Good! I am half-an-hour in advance of them, — perhaps an hour. Simpleton that I was! I have just escaped causing asphyxy by my foolish precipitation. Now," added he, rising in his stirrups to see at a distance among all the ropes and all the masts, "the 'Lightning,' where is the 'Lightning'?" At the moment when he pronounced mentally these words, as if to answer to his thought, a man lying on a coil of cables rose, and came towards him. Mordaunt took a handkerchief from his pocket, and let it float in the air. The man seemed attentive, but remained in the same place. Mordaunt then knotted the four corners; the man came up to him. It was the pre-arranged signal. The sailor was enveloped in a large woollen wrapper which hid his figure and face.

"Sir," said the sailor, "have you perchance come from London to take a turn on the sea?"

"Expressly; from the Isle of Dogs."

"That is it. And doubtless you have some preference? There is one ship you prefer to the rest? A fast sailer?"

"Like lightning," replied Mordaunt.

"Well, then, it's my ship you want, — I am the skipper."

"I begin to believe it, especially if you have not forgotten a fixed sign of recognition."

"Here it is, sir," said the sailor, taking from his pocket a handkerchief knotted at the four corners.

"Good!" said Mordaunt, dismounting. "Now there's no time to lose. Have my horse taken to the first inn, and lead me to your ship."

"But your companions? I thought there were four of you without counting the servants?"

"Listen," said Mordaunt; "I am not the one whom you were expecting, as you are not the one whom they hope to find. You have taken Captain Rogers's place, have you not? By orders from General Cromwell, and I come from him."

"In fact, I recognize you; you are Captain Mordaunt."

Mordaunt started.

"Oh, fear nothing," said the skipper, taking off his hood; "I am a friend."

"Captain Groslow!" exclaimed Mordaunt.

"The same. The general remembered that I was formerly in the marines, and gave me this expedition to take charge of. Is anything altered in the plan?"

"No; nothing. On the contrary, all is the same."

"For a moment I thought that the king's death —"

"That only hastens their flight; in a few minutes they will probably be here."

"Then what have you come to do?"

"To embark with you."

"Ah, ah! does the general doubt my zeal?"

"No; but I want myself to help in the work of vengeance. Have you any one who can take charge of my horse?"

Groslow whistled, and a sailor appeared.

"Patrick," said Groslow, "take this horse to the nearest stables. If they ask you whose it is, tell them it belongs to an Irish gentleman."

"But," said Mordaunt, "don't you fear they will recognize you?"

"There is no danger in this dress on such a dark night; besides, *you* did not recognize me, — they therefore are less likely to do so."

"That is true," said Mordaunt; "they will besides

never dream of seeing you. All is ready, is it not? The cargo has been put on board?"

"Yes."

"Five barrels full."

"And fifty empty."

"That is right."

"We are taking a cargo of port wine to Antwerp."

"Capital. Now take me on board and return to your post, for it will not be long before they come."

"I am ready."

"It is important that no one of your people should see me come on board."

"I have only one man on board, and I am as sure of him as of myself. Besides, this man does not know you, and like his companions is ready to obey our orders; but he is ignorant of everything."

"That is well; let us go."

They went down to the river-side. A small boat was moored there. They entered it; and Groslow began to row in such a way as to prove to Mordaunt that he had not forgotten his old occupation of mariner.

In about five minutes they got clear of the crowd of ships, which already at that period blocked the approach to London; and Mordaunt could see, like a dark point, the little felucca riding at anchor a few cables' length from the Isle of Dogs.

On approaching the "Lightning," Groslow gave a sort of whistle, and saw a man's head appear above the bulwarks.

"Is that you, Captain?" the man asked.

"Yes; throw down the ladder;" and Groslow, passing lightly and rapidly as a swallow under the bowsprit, was soon alongside.

"Go up," said Groslow to his companion.

Mordaunt seized the line, and climbed up the vessel's side with an agility and dexterity unusual in landsmen; but his desire of vengeance took the place of habit, and made him apt at everything.

As Groslow had foreseen, the sailor in charge did not seem to notice that his skipper returned with a companion. Mordaunt and Groslow advanced towards the captain's room. It was a sort of extemporized cabin on deck. The chief cabin had been reserved by Captain Rogers for his passengers.

"And where will *they* be?" asked Mordaunt.

"At the other end of the ship."

"Then I shall remain hidden here. Return to Greenwich, and bring them back. You have a boat?"

"That in which we came."

"It seems to me light and well built."

"A real canoe."

"Make it fast to the stern. Put some oars into it, that it may follow in the wake, and that there may be only a cord to cut. Supply it with rum and biscuits. If by chance the sea is rough, your men will not be sorry to find something at hand for refreshment."

"It shall be done as you desire. Do you wish to see the gun-room?"

"Not now, but when you return. I want to put the match myself, to make sure it will not burn too long. Above all, conceal your face, to prevent them from recognizing you."

"I 'll take care of that."

"Go; ten o'clock has just struck at Greenwich."

In fact, the vibrations of a bell ten times repeated traversed sadly the air which was heavy with great clouds that moved in the sky like silent waves. Groslow closed the door, which Mordaunt fastened on the inside, and

after having given orders to the sailor on duty to watch most attentively, got into the boat, which was soon on the way, tossing up the foam from the oars. The wind was cold and the jetty deserted when Groslow landed at Greenwich; several ships had just sailed at high tide. Just as he landed, he heard a galloping along the pebbly road.

"Oh, oh!" said he, "Mordaunt was right to hurry me; there was no time to lose. Here they are."

It was the advanced guard, made up of D'Artagnan and Athos. On reaching the place where Groslow was standing, they stopped, as if they had guessed he was there whom they wanted. Athos alighted, and quietly unrolled a handkerchief with its corners knotted, and let it float in the breeze, while D'Artagnan, always cautious, leaned half over his horse with one hand in the pistol-holsters.

Groslow, who in his doubt if these cavaliers were those he expected had hidden himself behind one of the cannon planted in the ground, which served to coil up the cables, arose then on seeing the signal agreed upon and went right up to the gentlemen. His hooded cloak was wrapped so closely around his head that it was impossible to see his face. Besides, the night was so dark that this precaution was superfluous. However, Athos's quick eye guessed, in spite of the darkness, that it was not Rogers.

"What do *you* want?" said he to Groslow, making a step back.

"I want to tell you, my Lord," replied Groslow, putting on an Irish accent, "that you are looking for Skipper Rogers, and sure you will not find him."

"How 's that?" asked Athos.

"Because this morn he fell from the topmast and broke his leg. But I am his cousin; he told me all about it, and charged me to look for the gentleman who should

show me a handkerchief knotted at the corners like that you have in your hand, and like the one in my pocket."

On saying this, Groslow took the handkerchief from his pocket which he had already shown to Mordaunt.

"Is that all?" Athos asked.

"Not at all, your Honor, for there are seventy-five livres promised if I land you safe and sound at Boulogne or some other point in France which you may name."

"What do you say to that, D'Artagnan?" asked Athos, in French.

"First of all, what does he say?"

Then Athos gave in French the conversation just held with the skipper.

"That seems to me reasonable enough," said the Gascon.

"So it does to me."

"Besides," resumed D'Artagnan, "if this man deceives us we can at any time blow his brains out."

"And who will navigate the vessel?"

"You, Athos; I do not doubt you understand something of navigation."

"Upon my word," said Athos, smiling; "though joking you have nearly hit upon the truth. I was intended by my father for the navy, and have some tolerable idea of piloting. Go then, and look for our friends; it 's now eleven, — we have no time to lose."

D'Artagnan advanced towards two cavaliers, who, pistol in hand, were stationed *en vedette* at the first houses of the town, waiting on the other side of the road against a sort of shed; three other horsemen were watching and waiting also.

The two watchers who formed the centre were Porthos and Aramis. The three others were Mousqueton, Blaisois, and Grimaud; only this last, on a closer look, was

double, for he had Parry's brother on the crupper, who was to take the horses back to London, which had been sold to the innkeeper to pay their bills. Thanks to this stroke of business the four friends were able to carry with them a sum of money, if not very large, yet at least sufficient to meet all contingencies.

D'Artagnan desired them to follow. They dismounted, and unfastened the portmanteaus. Parry felt sorry to separate from his friends; they asked him to go with them to France, but he obstinately refused. "The reason is plain enough," Mousqueton had said; "he has his idea in regard to Groslow." They recollected that it was Captain Groslow who had broken his head.

The little troop joined Athos; but D'Artagnan had already resumed his natural distrust. He found the quay too deserted, the night too black, the skipper too compliant. He had related to Aramis the incident which we have spoken of, and Aramis, not less distrustful than he, had not a little contributed to increase his suspicions. A little smacking of his tongue against his teeth notified Athos of the Gascon's disquietudes.

"We have no time to be suspicious," said Athos, "the boat is waiting; let us get in."

"Besides," said Aramis, "what prevents us from being suspicious, and getting in all the same? We will keep our eye on the skipper."

"And if he does not act right, I will smash him," said Porthos; "that's all."

"Well said, Porthos," replied D'Artagnan. "Get in, Mousqueton." And D'Artagnan stopped his friends, making the servants first try the plank which led from the jetty to the boat. They passed in, and then their masters without any accident. D'Artagnan went last, still continuing to shake his head.

"What the devil's the matter now, my friend?" said Porthos; "upon my word, you would make Cæsar feel afraid."

"The matter is that I see on this quay neither superintendent, nor sentinel, nor custom's officer."

"Do you complain, then?" said Porthos; "everything moves as on a flowery slope."

"Everything goes too well, Porthos. After all, no matter, we trust in the favor of God."

As soon as the plank was removed, the skipper took the tiller, and made a sign to one of the sailors, who with a boat-hook endeavored to get the boat through the labyrinth of ships in the midst of which it was entangled. The other sailor got an oar out to port. When they could use the oars, his companion joined him, and the boat began to make way rapidly.

"At last we are starting," said Porthos.

"Alas!" replied the count, "we are going away alone."

"Yes; but we are all four together, and without a scratch; that's one consolation."

"We have not yet reached our journey's end," said D'Artagnan; "beware of encounters!"

"Why, my dear fellow," said Porthos, "*you* are like the raven; you always croak of some ill. Who can encounter us on this dark night, when one sees scarcely twenty yards before us?"

"Yes; but to-morrow morning?" said D'Artagnan.

"We shall then be at Boulogne."

"I hope so heartily, and I confess my weakness," said the Gascon. "Stop, Athos, you are going to laugh; but all the time we have been within musket-range of the jetty or the buildings. I have been expecting some fusillade which would finish us off."

"But," said Porthos, with his large good sense, "that

was impossible, for the skipper and sailors would have been killed too."

"Bah! how much would that trouble M. Mordaunt? Do you think he makes such fine distinctions?"

"Well," said Porthos, "I am very glad that D'Artagnan confesses he feels fearful."

"Not only confesses it, but boasts of it. I am not a rhinoceros like you. Holloa, what is that?"

"The 'Lightning,'" said the skipper.

"We are then arrived," asked Athos, in English.

"We are arriving," said the captain.

And after two or three strokes they were alongside the small vessel. The sailor was on watch; the ladder was ready. He had recognized the boat. Athos came on board with all the readiness of a sailor; Aramis, with the dexterity which he had acquired with rope-ladders and other means, more or less ingenious, for reaching forbidden places; D'Artagnan, like a chamois-hunter; Porthos, with that expenditure of force which in his case made up for everything.

With the servants the operation was more difficult, — not for Grimaud, a kind of gutter cat, lean and slender, who always found means to raise himself anywhere; but for Mousqueton and Blaisois, whom the sailors had to lift in their arms within reach of Porthos's hand, who grasped them by the collars of their coats, and deposited them upright on the deck of the vessel.

The captain led his passengers to the apartment prepared for them, and which was a cabin for them to use in common; then he tried to get away under the pretext of giving some orders.

"One moment," said D'Artagnan; "how many men have you on board, Skipper?"

"I don't understand," replied the latter, in English.

"Athos, ask him in his own language."

"Three," replied Groslow, "without counting me, mind."

D'Artagnan understood, for in answering the skipper had raised three fingers.

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan; "three, — that re-assures me a little. No matter; while you are installing yourselves, *I* will take a turn round the ship."

"And I," said Porthos, — "I am going to be busy about supper."

"That project is a good and generous one; put it into execution. Athos, lend me Grimaud, who in company with his friend, Parry's brother, has learned to jabber a little English; he will do for interpreter."

"Go, Grimaud," said Athos.

A lantern was on the deck; D'Artagnan took it in one hand and a pistol in the other, and said to the skipper, "Come."

This, with "God damn," was all he knew of the English language. He descended by the hatchway to the lower deck. This was divided into three compartments, — that in which D'Artagnan now was, extending from the mizzen-mast to the end of the poop, and which was consequently under the chamber in which the four friends were preparing to pass the night; the second, amidship, was for the servants; the third under the cabin improvised by the captain, and in which Mordaunt lay hid.

"Oh, oh!" said D'Artagnan, going down the hatchway ladder, holding the lantern at arm's length before him, "what a lot of casks! It 's like Ali Baba's cave."

"The Thousand and One Nights" had just been translated for the first time, and was very much in vogue at that period.

"What do you say?" asked the captain, in English.

D'Artagnan understood by the intonation of his voice.

"I want to know what there is in these casks?" added D'Artagnan, putting the lantern on the top of one of them.

The skipper moved towards the ladder; but he recollected himself.

"Port," said he.

"Ah! port wine?" said D'Artagnan; "that 's always satisfactory. Then we shall not die of thirst."

Then turning towards Groslow, who was wiping the sweat from his brow, "And are they full?" he asked.

Grimaud translated the question.

"Some are, and some are empty," said Groslow, in a voice which in spite of his efforts betrayed his disquietude.

D'Artagnan knocked the barrels with his knuckle and discovered that five were full and the rest empty; then he introduced the lantern, to the great fear of the Englishman, between the casks, and observing that the spaces between were unoccupied, "Well, let us go," said he, and went towards the door which opened into the second compartment.

"Wait," said the Englishman, who had stopped behind, still a prey to that feeling of fear, — "wait, I have the key;" and passing in front of D'Artagnan and Grimaud, he opened the door with trembling hand into the second compartment, where Mousqueton and Blaisois were getting supper ready. In this compartment there was nothing to find fault with. They looked in all the corners and recesses by the light of the lamp which was used by these worthy companions.

They then visited rapidly the third compartment. This was the forecastle. Three or four hammocks hung from the ceiling; a table kept in position by a stout cord fastened to each of its ends, two forms, very worm-eaten and

rickety, completed its furniture. D'Artagnan lifted up two or three old sails hanging against the sides, and not seeing anything which looked suspicious, regained the deck by the hatchway.

"And this cabin?" asked D'Artagnan.

Grimaud translated the musketeer's words.

"This is mine; do you wish to go in?"

"Open the door," said D'Artagnan.

The Englishman obeyed; D'Artagnan thrust in his arm with the lantern, put his head through the half-opened door, and seeing that the room was really used as a cabin, "Good," said he; "if there is an army on board, it is not hidden in here. Let us go and see if Porthos has found any supper."

After thanking the skipper by a nod of the head, he returned to his friends.

Porthos had found nothing, as it appeared, or if he had, fatigue had overcome his hunger, for lying on his cloak he was sound asleep.

Athos and Aramis, rocked by the gentle movements of the first waves of the sea, had begun also to close their eyes; they opened them at the noise which the entrance of their companion made.

"Well?" said Aramis.

"All is right," said D'Artagnan, "and we can sleep in peace."

On this assurance, Aramis let his head fall again, Athos gave a friendly nod; and D'Artagnan who, like Porthos, had much more need of sleep than food, dismissed Grimaud, and lay down in his cloak with his drawn sword in such a manner that his body barred the entrance, and it was impossible to enter without striking against him.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PORT WINE.

At the end of ten minutes the masters were sleeping; but it was not so with the servants, who were hungry, and especially thirsty. Blaisois and Mousqueton were preparing their bed, which consisted of a plank and a portmanteau, while on a table fastened like that in the neighboring compartment a pot of beer and three glasses were balancing with the rolling of the sea.

"Cursed rolling!" said Blaisois; "I feel that it is going to make me as sick as I was when I came over."

"And only to have barley bread and beer to combat sea-sickness," replied Mousqueton, "bah!"

"But your straw-covered flask, M. Mouston," asked Blaisois, — "have you lost it?"

"Parry's brother has kept it. These devils of Scots are always thirsty. And you, Grimaud," who had just returned after accompanying D'Artagnan, "are you thirsty too?"

"As a Scotchman," laconically replied Grimaud; and he took a seat near Blaisois and Mousqueton, took a note-book from his pocket, and began noting down items of expenditure, as he was the steward of the party.

"Oh, la, la!" said Blaisois, "how out of order my stomach is!"

"If that be so," said Mousqueton, with the air of a doctor, "take a little nourishment."

"You call that nourishment?" said Blaisois, pointing

his finger with a piteous look at the barley bread and pot of beer.

"Blaisois," resumed Mousqueton, "remember that bread is the proper nourishment of the Frenchman; yet the Frenchman has not always got it. Ask Grimaud."

"Yes, but the beer," replied Blaisois, with a promptitude which did honor to his power of repartee; "is beer his true drink?"

"As for that," said Mousqueton, caught in a dilemma, and somewhat embarrassed how to reply, "I must confess it is not, and that beer is as antipathic to him as wine is to the English."

"What, M. Mouston," said Blaisois, who doubted for this once Mousqueton's profound knowledge, for which, ordinarily, he had the highest admiration, — "what! the English not like wine?"

"They hate it."

"Yet I have seen them drink it."

"For penance; and the proof is," continued Mousqueton, bridling up, "that an English prince died one day because they put him into a cask of malvoisie. I have heard M l'Abbé d'Herblay tell this as a fact."

"The fool!" said Blaisois. "I should like to have been in his place!"

"So you can," said Grimaud, while arranging his figures.

"What do you mean by, *so I can?*" said Blaisois.

"Yes," continued Grimaud, while remembering four, and carrying it to the next column.

"*So I can?* Explain your meaning, M. Grimaud."

Mousqueton kept silence during Blaisois's questions, but it was easy to see from the expression of his face that it was not at all from indifference.

Grimaud continued his calculations, and put down the sum total.

"Port," said he then, stretching out his hand in the direction of the first compartment visited by D'Artagnan and himself.

"What! those casks which I saw through the half-opened door?"

"Port," Grimaud repeated, beginning a fresh arithmetical operation.

"I have heard say," replied Blaisois, speaking to Mousqueton, "that port is an excellent Spanish wine."

"Excellent," said Mousqueton, passing the end of his tongue along his lips, — "excellent. There is some of it in the cellar of M. le Baron de Bracieux."

"Suppose we were to ask the English to sell us a bottle?" honest Blaisois asked.

"To sell!" said Mousqueton, carried away by his old marauding instincts. "It is easily seen, young man, that you have not had much experience of life. Now, why buy when one can take?"

"Take," said Blaisois; "covet thy neighbor's goods! — the thing is forbidden, it seems to me."

"Where?" asked Mousqueton.

"In the commandments of God or of the Church, I am not sure which. But what I know is this: 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.'"

"That's a child's reason, M. Blaisois," said Mousqueton, in his most patronizing tone. "Yes, a child's, I repeat the words. Where have you seen in the Scriptures, I ask you, that the English were your neighbors?"

"Well, nowhere; that 's true," said Blaisois.

"A child's reason, I repeat. If you had been at the wars for ten years, as Grimaud and I have been, my dear Blaisois, you would soon have learned how to distinguish between thy neighbor's goods and thine enemy's. Now,

an Englishman is an enemy, I think; and this port wine belongs to the English. Consequently it belongs to us, since we are French. Don't you know the proverb, 'It's so much gained of an enemy?'"

This eloquence, supported by all the authority which Mousqueton drew from his long experience, stupefied Blaisois. He lowered his head as if to gather his ideas, and suddenly raising his forehead as a man armed with an irresistible argument: "And will our masters," asked Blaisois, "be of your opinion, M. Mouston?"

Mousqueton smiled contemptuously.

"I should be obliged to go and disturb the sleep of those illustrious lords to tell them: 'Messieurs, your servant Mousqueton is thirsty. Will you give him permission to drink?' What matters it, I ask you, to M. de Bracieux whether I am thirsty or not?"

"It is a very expensive wine," said Blaisois, shaking his head.

"Were it drinkable gold, M. Blaisois," said Mousqueton, "our masters would not deprive themselves of it. Learn that M. le Baron de Bracieux is himself rich enough to drink a tun of port, even if obliged to pay a pistole the drop. Now, I don't see why the servants should deprive themselves of it, if the masters would not;" and Mousqueton getting up, took up the pot of beer which he emptied through a port-hole to the last drop, and then went majestically towards the door leading to the first compartment.

"Ah, locked!" said he. "These devils of English, how suspicious they are!"

"Locked!" said Blaisois, in a tone no less disappointed than Mousqueton. "Ah, *peste!* that's unfortunate; especially as I feel my stomach grow more and more disturbed."

Mousqueton turned towards Blaisois with a face so piteous that it was evident he shared in a high degree the disappointment of the brave fellow.

"Locked!" repeated he.

"But," ventured Blaisois, "I have heard you relate, M. Mouston, that once in your youth, at Chantilly I think, you fed your master and yourself by taking some partridges with a snare, some carp with a line, and some bottles of wine with a lasso."

"Without doubt," replied Mousqueton, "it is the exact truth; and here is Grimaud who can vouch for it. But there was a vent-hole to the cellar, and the wine was in bottles. I cannot throw the lasso through this partition, nor draw with a cord a cask of wine which weighs perhaps two quintals."

"No, but you could remove two or three planks of the partition," said Blaisois, "and make a hole with a gimlet in one of the casks."

Mousqueton opened wide his round eyes, and looked at Blaisois like a man astonished at finding in another some unsuspected qualities.

"That's true. It can be done; but we want a chisel to remove the boards, and a gimlet to bore a hole in the cask."

"The case of tools," said Grimaud, completing the balance of his accounts.

"Ah, yes! of course, and I did not think of it," said Mousqueton.

Grimaud was in fact not only the steward, but also the armorer of the company. Besides his account-book, he had his case of tools. It contained a gimlet of tolerable size. Mousqueton took it. To serve as a chisel, Mousqueton took the poniard which he carried in his belt. He then looked where the planks were not closely joined, — a thing

not difficult to find, — and then set to work at once. Blaisois looked at him as he worked, with admiration mixed with impatience, venturing from time to time, on the manner of drawing a nail or making a hole, observations full of intelligence and clearness. In a short time Mousqueton had made three planks yield.

"There," said Blaisois.

Mousqueton was the opposite to the frog in the fable who thought himself larger than he was. Unfortunately, if he had succeeded in diminishing his name by a third, it was not the same with his stomach. He tried to get through the opening, but saw with grief that two or three more planks must be removed before the opening suited his bulk. He uttered a sigh. But Grimaud, who had finished his accounts, had seen the fruitless efforts made by Mousqueton to reach the promised land.

"Let me," said Grimaud.

This expression was worth more from him alone, as is known, than a whole poem. Mousqueton turned round.

"What, you?" he asked.

"Yes; I shall get through."

"That 's true," said Mousqueton, casting a look at the slender body of his friend; "you can easily do so."

"That 's all right; he knows the full casks," said Blaisois, "since he has already been in the cellar with M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan. Let M. Grimaud get through, M. Mouston."

"I should have passed through there as well as Grimaud," said Mousqueton, a little piqued.

"Yes, but it would take longer and I am very thirsty. I feel my stomach getting more and more upset."

"Go on, then, Grimaud," said Mousqueton, giving up to him the beer-pot and the gimlet.

"Rinse the glasses," said Grimaud. Then he gave

Mousqueton a friendly nod that the latter might pardon him for finishing an adventure so brilliantly begun by another, and like a snake glided through the opening and disappeared.

Blaisois seemed in an ecstasy. Of all the exploits performed since their arrival in England by the extraordinary men with whom he had the honor to be connected, this seemed to him, without contradiction, the most miraculous.

"You will see presently," said Mousqueton, looking at Blaisois with an air of superiority from which the latter did not even attempt to escape, — "you will soon see, Blaisois, how we old soldiers can drink when thirsty."

"The cloak," said Grimaud, from the bottom of the cellar.

"Quite right," said Mousqueton.

"What does he want?" asked Blaisois.

"That the opening should be stopped up with a cloak."

"What's that done for?"

"You innocent! Suppose some one should come in."

"Ah, that's true!" exclaimed Blaisois, with increasing admiration. "But he will not see very clearly."

"Grimaud always sees clearly, by night as well as by day."

"He is a fortunate fellow; when *I* go without a candle, *I* cannot take two steps without hitting something."

"That's because you have not been in the service; otherwise you would have learned to pick up a needle in a dark room. But silence! I think some one is coming."

Mousqueton gave a low whistle of warning which had been familiar to the servants in their younger days, took his place at the table again, and made a sign to Blaisois to do likewise.

Blaisois obeyed. The door opened. Two men enveloped in their cloaks appeared.

"Oh, oh!" said one of them, "not yet abed at a quarter past eleven? that's against the rules. In a quarter of an hour let all lights be out, and every one be asleep."

The two men went to the compartment into which Grimaud had glided, and closed the door behind them.

"Ah!" said Blaisois, trembling; "he is lost!"

"Grimaud is by far too cunning a fox," muttered Mousqueton; and they waited, listening closely, and holding their breath. Ten minutes passed, during which they heard no noise leading them to suspect that Grimaud was discovered.

This time passed, Mousqueton and Blaisois saw the door open, the two men in cloaks come out, shut the door with the same precautions they had used in entering it, and then they went out renewing the order to go to bed and put out the lights.

"Shall we obey?" asked Blaisois; "all this seems to me suspicious."

"They have said a quarter of an hour; we have still five minutes," replied Mousqueton.

"If we forewarn the masters?"

"Let us wait for Grimaud."

"But if they have killed him?"

"Grimaud would have cried out."

"You know he is almost mute."

"We should have heard the blow, then"

"But if he does not come back?"

"Here he is."

In fact, at that moment Grimaud removed the cloak that covered the opening, and passed his head through the opening, his eyes staring from fright, showing small pupils in large white circles. He held in his hand the beer-pot, full of something or other, which he held near the smoky lamp, and ejaculated the simple monosyllable, "Oh!" with

an expression of such profound terror that Mousqueton stepped back, frightened, and Blaisois felt ready to faint. Nevertheless, they both threw a look of curiosity into the beer-pot; it was full of powder.

Once convinced that the ship was laden with powder instead of wine, Grimaud rushed towards the hatchway, and in a bound reached the cabin where the four friends were asleep. He pushed the door gently open, which awakened D'Artagnan, who lay behind it.

Scarcely had D'Artagnan seen the disturbed look of Grimaud, before he felt sure that something extraordinary was going on; but Grimaud, with a gesture, made more quickly than words could be spoken, put his finger to his lips, and with a good puff extinguished the little lamp three paces off.

D'Artagnan raised himself on his elbow, and Grimaud, kneeling, whispered in his ear an account which was so extremely dramatic as to dispense with gesture or the play of the countenance. During this recital Athos, Porthos, and Aramis were sleeping like men who had not slept for a week; and in the between decks, Mousqueton from precaution was tying up his aigulets, while Blaisois, full of horror, the hair standing erect on his head, was trying to do the same. This is what had happened.

Grimaud had scarcely disappeared through the opening than he began his search, and found a cask. He struck it; it was empty. He went to another; that also was empty. But the third on which he made the trial gave so dull a sound that he could not be deceived. It was full.

He stooped there, felt for a suitable spot for boring a hole, and in the search put his hand on a cock.

"Good!" said Grimaud, "that will spare me my labor." And he put the beer-pot to it, turned the cock, and felt

the contents passing into the pot. After taking the precaution to close the cock, he was going to put the pot to his lips, being too conscientious to take to his companions a liquor whose quality he could not guarantee, when he heard the signal of alarm given by Mousqueton. He suspected it was the night-watch on their rounds; he slipped between two casks, and hid himself behind one.

A moment after, in fact, two men in cloaks entered, and closed the door behind them. One of them carried a lantern with glass sides, carefully closed, and of such a height that the flame could not reach the top. Besides, the glass itself was covered with a sheet of white paper, which softened, or rather absorbed, the light and heat. This man was Groslow.

The other held in his hand something long, flexible, and twisted like a whitish cord. His face was covered with a broad-brimmed hat. Grimaud, thinking that the same feeling as his own brought them to the cellar, and that, like himself, they came to visit the port wine, shrank more and more behind the cask, saying to himself that if he were discovered the crime was not so very great.

The two men stopped at the cask behind which Grimaud was hiding.

"Have you the match?" asked the one carrying the lantern.

"Here it is," said the other.

At the voice of the latter, Grimaud shook, and felt a shiver penetrate even to the marrow of his bones. He lifted himself gently, so that his head was just above the cask, and beneath the large hat he recognized Mordaunt's pale face.

"How long will this match burn?" he asked.

"Well, about five minutes."

This voice also seemed familiar to Grimaud. His

glances went from the one to the other, and after Mordaunt he recognized Groslow.

"Then," said Mordaunt, "you are going to tell your men to hold themselves in readiness without telling them why. Is the boat in the ship's wake?"

"Just as a dog follows his master at the end of a hempen leash."

"Then, when the clock chimes the quarter after midnight, collect your men, and get without noise into the boat — "

"After having lighted the match."

"I will see to that. I wish to make sure of my revenge. Are the oars in the canoe?"

"Everything is ready."

"Right."

"All is thoroughly understood, then?"

Mordaunt knelt down, and fastened one end of the match to the cock, so as to have merely to light the other end.

Then when finished, he took out his watch.

"You understand? — a quarter past twelve," said he, getting up; "that is to say," — he looked at his watch, — "in twenty minutes."

"Precisely, Monsieur," replied Groslow; "only I think it right to observe, for the last time, that there is some danger in the task you have kept for yourself, and that it would be much better to let one of the men set light to the train."

"My dear Groslow," said Mordaunt, "you know the French proverb, 'On n'est bien servi que par soi-même' [If you want a thing done well, do it yourself]. I shall put that in practice."

Grimaud had heard all, if he had not understood all; but what he saw supplied what he imperfectly comprehended. He had seen and recognized the two mortal

enemies of the musketeers. He had seen Mordaunt lay the train; he had understood the proverb, which for its greater pithiness Mordaunt had said in French. Then he felt and felt again the contents of the jug, which he held in his hand, and in place of the liquid which Mousqueton and Blaisois were expecting to find, grains of coarse powder grated and were crushed under his fingers.

Mordaunt and the skipper went off. At the door he stopped, listening.

"Do you hear how soundly they are sleeping?" he said. In fact, one could hear through the boards Porthos snoring.

"It 's God who delivers them to us," said Groslow.

"And this time," said Mordaunt, "the Devil could not save them."

And they both went away.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE PORT WINE (*concluded*).

GRIMAUD waited till he heard the bolt grate in the lock, and when quite sure that he was alone, he slowly raised himself, and groped for the partition.

"Ah," he ejaculated, while wiping off with his sleeve the large drops of sweat which beaded his forehead; "how fortunate it was that Mousqueton was thirsty!"

He hurried back through the opening, thinking it was a dream; but the sight of the powder in the beer-jug proved that this dream was a deadly nightmare.

D'Artagnan, as one may suppose, heard all these details with a growing interest, and without waiting for Grimaud to finish, he got up at once, and putting his mouth close to Aramis's ear, who was sleeping at his left, and touching him on the shoulder to prevent any quick movement, "Chevalier," he said to him, "get up, and don't make the least noise. You have Athos at your left; tell him as I have told you."

Aramis easily awoke Athos, whose sleep was light, as is the case with all delicately organized natures; but they had greater difficulty in awaking Porthos. He was going to ask the reasons for this interruption of his sleep, which seemed to him very annoying, when D'Artagnan as full explanation put his hand before his mouth.

Then our Gascon, extending his arms, and drawing them towards himself again, enclosed in their circle the

three heads of his friends so that they almost touched one another.

"Friends," said he, "we must leave this ship at once, or we shall all be dead men."

"Bah!" said Athos; "what next?"

"Do you know who the captain is? Why, Captain Groslow."

A shudder from the three showed D'Artagnan that his words began to make some impression on his friends.

"Groslow!" said Aramis; "the devil it is!"

"Who is he, — Groslow?" asked Porthos; "I don't remember him."

"He who broke the head of Parry's brother, and who is now ready to break ours. And his lieutenant? Do you know who he is."

"His lieutenant? He has none," said Athos. "There is no lieutenant to a felucca with a crew of four men."

"Yes, but M. Groslow is not like other captains; *he* has a lieutenant, and that is M. Mordaunt."

This time it was more than a shudder, — it was almost a cry. These invincible men seemed under a mysterious and fatal influence which this name exercised over them, and felt terror even at hearing the name pronounced.

"What's to be done?" said Athos.

"Seize the felucca," said Aramis.

"And kill him," said Porthos.

"The felucca is mined," said D'Artagnan. "Those casks that I took for casks of port wine are powder casks. When Mordaunt finds out he is discovered, he will blow all up together, friends and enemies; and upon my word, he is too bad company for me to desire to present myself in his society either in heaven or in hell."

"Have you formed a plan?" asked Athos.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Have you any confidence in me?"

"Yes. Give your orders," said all the three friends together.

"Well, come!"

D'Artagnan went to a low window like a port-hole, but big enough to admit a man; he made it turn on its hinge.

"That 's the road," said he.

"The devil!" said Aramis; "it looks very cold, my friend."

"Stay here if you like; but I forewarn you that it will become very hot presently."

"But we cannot reach the land by swimming."

"The boat is astern; we shall reach it, and then cut the rope. That 's all. Come on, Messieurs."

"One moment," said Athos; "the servants?"

"Here we are," said Mousqueton and Blaisois, whom Grimaud had been to fetch so as to concentrate all their strength in the cabin, and who by the hatchway, which was close to the door, had entered without being seen. Meanwhile the three friends stood motionless before the terrible spectacle which D'Artagnan had exposed to view by raising the shutter. In fact, whoever has once seen this sight knows that nothing is more profoundly startling than a rough sea rolling with the dull sounds of its black waves under the pale light of a wintry moon.

"*Cordieu!*" said D'Artagnan, "we are hesitating, it seems to me! If *we* hesitate, what will the servants do?"

"*I* don't hesitate," said Grimaud.

"Monsieur," said Blaisois, "I can swim only in rivers, I beg to say."

"And I can't swim at all," said Mousqueton.

Meanwhile, D'Artagnan had slipped through the opening.

"You are decided then, friend?" said Athos.

"Yes," replied the Gascon. "Come, Athos, you who are a perfect man, command spirit to rule over matter. You, Aramis, give the word to the servants. You, Porthos, kill all who interpose any obstacle."

And D'Artagnan, after having pressed Athos's hand, chose the moment when by the pitching of the felucca the stern dipped; so that he had only to let himself glide into the water, which already reached his waist. Athos followed him before the felucca righted herself. When she did, the rope attached to the boat was seen tightening and rising from the water. D'Artagnan swam towards it, and laid hold of it, where he waited, hanging to this rope by one hand and his head alone at the level of the water. At the end of a second Athos joined him. Then they saw when the felucca dipped two other heads appearing. They were those of Aramis and Grimaud.

"Blaisois troubles me," said Athos; "did he not say he knew how to swim in rivers only?"

"When one knows how to swim, you can swim anywhere," said D'Artagnan; "to the boat! to the boat!"

"But Porthos? I don't see him."

"Porthos is coming, rest assured; he swims like leviathan himself."

Porthos did not appear at all; for a scene half-burlesque, half-dramatic, took place between him, Mousqueton, and Blaisois.

These, frightened by the noise of the water, by the whistling of the wind, scared at the sight of this black water boiling in a gulf, fell back instead of advancing.

"Come, come!" said Porthos, "jump in!"

"But, Monsieur," said Mousqueton, "I don't know how to swim; leave me here."

"And me also, Monsieur," said Blaisois.

"I assure you that I shall encumber you in that small boat," replied Mousqueton.

"And I shall be drowned, I am sure, before reaching it," continued Blaisois.

"Come now, I will strangle you both if you don't go," said Porthos, seizing them by the throat. "Go first, Blaisois."

A groan stopped by the iron hand of Porthos was all Blaisois's reply, for the giant, holding him by the neck and feet, made him slip through the window like a plank, and sent him head first into the sea.

"Now, Mouston," said Porthos, "I hope you will not abandon your master."

"Ah, Monsieur!" said Mousqueton, with tears in his eyes, "why did you go back into the service? We were so comfortable at the Château de Pierrefonds!"

And without further word of reproach, now passive and obedient, whether from real devotion, or from the example shown by Blaisois, Mousqueton took a header into the sea, — a sublime act in either case, for Mousqueton believed himself drowned.

But Porthos was not a man thus to abandon his faithful companion. The master followed so near his valet that the fall of the two bodies made only one and the same splash; so that when Mousqueton rose to the surface quite blinded, he found himself held up by Porthos's large hand, and could, without the need of any movement, advance towards the rope with the majesty of a sea-god.

At the same instant, Porthos saw something whirling round within reach of his arm. He seized this something by its hair; it was Blaisois, towards whom Athos was already coming.

"Go, go, Count," said Porthos; "I have no need of you!"

And in fact, with one stroke of his vigorous leg, Porthos rose up like the giant Adamastor above the billows, and in three efforts he found himself joined to his companions.

D'Artagnan, Aramis, and Grimaud helped Mousqueton and Blaisois to get in, then came Porthos's turn, who in climbing over the side almost upset the boat.

"And Athos?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Here I am!" said Athos, who like a general conducting a retreat wished to embark last, and remained himself by the boat's edge.

"Are you all here?"

"All," said D'Artagnan. "Athos, have you your poniard?"

"Yes."

"Then cut the rope and come in."

Athos drew his poniard from his belt, and cut the rope. The felucca went on ahead; the boat remained stationary, except what motion the waves gave it. D'Artagnan gave his hand to the Comte de la Fère, who took his place in the boat.

"It was time," said the Gascon; "and you are going to see something very curious."

CHAPTER XXXII.

FATALITY.

In fact, D'Artagnan had hardly finished speaking when a whistle resounded on the felucca, which began to be hidden in the mist and darkness. "That, as you well comprehend," said the Gascon, "means something." Then a lantern was seen on deck, and lighted up the shadows in the stern.

Suddenly a terrible cry of despair rang through space, and as if it had chased away the clouds, the veil which had hidden the moon moved away, and silvered by her pale light, the gray canvas and the black rigging of the felucca were outlined on the sky.

Some shadows were running up and down distracted, and some lamentable cries accompanied these mad promenades. In the midst of these cries, Mordaunt was seen on the poop with a torch in his hand. These shadows which were going up and down the ship were Groslow and his men, whom he had assembled at the hour named by Mordaunt, while the latter, after listening at the door of the cabin to know if the musketeers were still sleeping, had gone down to the hold, re-assured by their silence. Who could indeed have had a suspicion of what had just happened?

Mordaunt had consequently opened the door, and hastened to the match; burning with his thirst for revenge, and sure of it, in his providential ignorance of what had

taken place, he had set fire to the sulphur. Meanwhile Groslow and his sailors were assembled at the stern.

"Haul in the line," said Groslow, "and bring up the boat."

One of the sailors got over the ship's side, seized the rope and pulled; it came to him without any resistance.

"The rope is cut!" exclaimed the sailor; "there's no boat there."

"What do you mean? no boat?" said Groslow; "it's impossible!"

"That's the case, though," said the sailor. "See for yourself; there's nothing in the wake, and besides, here's the end of the rope."

It was then that Groslow uttered the wild cry which the musketeers had heard.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Mordaunt, who, coming from the hatchway, hurried aft with the torch in his hand.

"The matter is that our enemies have escaped; they are in the boat."

Mordaunt made but one bound to the cabin, the door of which he burst open with his foot.

"Empty!" he exclaimed. "Oh, the demons!"

"We will pursue them," said Groslow. "They can't be far off; and we will sink them."

"Yes; but the fire!" said Mordaunt; "I have set fire to the match."

"A thousand thunders!" howled Groslow, tumbling down the hatchway. "Perhaps there is still time."

Mordaunt only replied by a terrible laugh; and his features, distorted by hate more than fear, were upturned to utter one more blasphemy. He first of all threw the torch into the sea and himself after it.

At the same instant that Groslow put his foot on the

hatchway the ship opened like the crater of a volcano. A jet of fire darted upwards with an explosion like that of a hundred pieces of cannon discharged at once. The sky was illuminated by the blazing fragments, then the "Lightning" disappeared; the fragments one after the other fell hissing into the abyss, where they were extinguished, and excepting a vibration in the air it seemed as if nothing had taken place. Only the felucca had disappeared from the face of the ocean, and Groslow and his three men were destroyed.

The four friends had seen all the details of this terrible drama. An instant inundated with this striking light which had illumined the sea for more than a league, each one could have been seen in a different attitude, expressing the consternation which, despite their hearts of bronze, they could not help experiencing. Soon the rain of flames fell all around them; then at last the volcano was extinguished as we have narrated, and everything returned to obscurity, — floating bark, and howling ocean. They remained a short time silent and dejected. Porthos and D'Artagnan, each of whom took an oar, kept them mechanically above the waves, leaning their whole weight on them and compressing them with their tight grasp.

"Upon my word," said Aramis, who was the first to break this deathlike silence, "this time I really believe all is finished."

"Help, my Lords! help!" cried some one, in a lamentable voice, the accents of which reached the four friends, and which seemed like that of an ocean spirit.

They looked at one another. Athos himself shook.

"It is he! That's his voice!" said he.

All were silent, for all had recognized that voice. Only their eyes with dilated pupils turned in the direction where

the vessel had disappeared, as they eagerly tried to pierce the darkness. Presently they were able to distinguish a man swimming vigorously towards them. Athos pointed him out to his companions.

"Yes, yes," said D'Artagnan; "I see him well enough."

"He again!" said Porthos, breathing like a blacksmith's bellows. "Ah, come, but is he made of iron?"

Mordaunt made a few strokes, and then raising a hand above the water as a signal of distress, cried, "Have pity, Messieurs, in Heaven's name! I feel my strength leaving me. I am dying."

The voice thus imploring help was so plaintive that it began to excite the compassion of Athos's heart. "The wretched being!" he murmured.

"Good!" said D'Artagnan. "There was only wanting to you the folly of pitying him. In fact, I believe he is swimming towards us. Does he really think we are going to take him in? Row, Porthos, row!"

And setting the example, D'Artagnan plunged his oar into the sea; two pulls carried the boat twenty strokes from the swimmer.

"Oh, you will not abandon me!" exclaimed Mordaunt; "you will not let me perish! you will not be without pity!"

"Ah, ah!" said Porthos, "I think we have got you at last, my fine fellow, and that you have no other means of escape than by the gates of hell."

"Oh, Porthos!" murmured the Comte de la Fère.

"Let me alone, Athos, you really are getting ridiculous with your continual expressions of generosity! Now, I declare that if he comes within ten feet of the boat I will break his head with a blow of the oar."

"Oh, be pitiful! Don't leave me, Messieurs! have pity on me!" cried the young man, whose pantings for

breath caused the icy waters to bubble up when his head disappeared under the wave.

D'Artagnan, who, while following every movement of Mordaunt, had finished his colloquy with Aramis, rose.

"Monsieur," said he, addressing the swimmer, "be off, if you please. Your repentance is too recent for us to have much confidence in it. Bear in mind that the ship in which you wanted to grill us still smokes a few feet below the surface, and that the situation in which you are is a bed of roses in comparison with that in which you desired to put us, and in which you have placed M. Groslow and his companions."

"Messieurs," replied Mordaunt, with an accent more despairing, "I swear to you that my repentance is sincere. Messieurs, I am so young, — I am scarcely twenty-three. I have been led on by the very natural desire to revenge my mother, and you all would have done what I have done."

"Ugh!" grunted D'Artagnan, seeing that Athos was much moved, "that depends on circumstances."

Mordaunt had no more than three or four strokes to make to reach the boat, for the approach of death seemed to give him supernatural strength.

"Alas! I must die, then; you mean to kill the son as you did his mother! And yet I was not guilty. Besides, if it is a crime, since I repent of it, since I ask pardon, I ought to be pardoned."

Then, as if his strength failed him, he seemed no longer to have the power of holding himself up, and a wave passed over his head which drowned his voice.

"Oh, how that tortures me!" said Athos.

Mordaunt appeared again.

"And I," replied D'Artagnan, — "I say that we must

end this. Monsieur the assassin of your uncle, Monsieur the executioner of King Charles, Monsieur the incendiary, I promise to leave you to sink to the bottom; or, if you approach the boat a single stroke nearer, I will break your head with my oar."

Mordaunt, as if in despair, made one stroke. D'Artagnan took his oar in both hands. Athos rose.

"D'Artagnan!" he exclaimed; "D'Artagnan, my son, I beg this of you! The wretch is going to die, and it is terrible to let a man die without giving a hand when a hand can save him. Oh! my heart forbids such an action. He must live!"

"*Mordieu!*" replied D'Artagnan, "why do you not hand yourself to this wretch at once with your hands and feet tied? It would be sooner finished. Ah, Comte de la Fère! you wish to perish through him; well! I, your son, as you call me, don't wish it."

This was the first time that D'Artagnan resisted an entreaty made by Athos, addressing him as son. Aramis coolly drew his sword, which he had carried between his teeth when swimming.

"If he puts his hand on the boat's sides, I will cut it off, — the regicide that he is," said the latter.

"And I," said Porthos, "wait —"

"What are you going to do?" asked Aramis.

"I am going to throw myself into the water and strangle him."

"Oh, Messieurs!" exclaimed Athos, with irresistible feeling, "be men; be Christians!"

D'Artagnan uttered a sigh more like a groan; Aramis lowered his sword; Porthos sat down.

"See," continued Athos, "death is painted on his face; one minute more and he sinks to the bottom. Ah! do not give me this horrible remorse, do not force me to die

of shame in my turn. My friends, grant me the life of this wretched being, and I will bless you ; I will — "

"I am dying!" muttered Mordaunt ; "help! — help! — "

"Let us gain a minute," said Aramis, leaning to the left while addressing D'Artagnan. "One pull more," added he, leaning to the right towards Porthos.

D'Artagnan replied neither by gesture nor word ; he began to be moved, partly by Athos's supplications, partly by the spectacle before him. Porthos alone pulled the stroke, and as it had no counterbalance, the boat turned partly round, and thus brought Athos close to the dying man.

"M. le Comte de la Fère!" exclaimed Mordaunt, "I address you ; I implore you to pity me — where are you? I cannot see any more — I am dying! help! help!"

"Here I am, Monsieur," said Athos, leaning over and extending his arm towards Mordaunt with that nobility and dignity which were habitual to him. "Take my hand, and come into the boat."

"I prefer not looking," said D'Artagnan ; "this weakness is repugnant to me."

He turned towards the two friends, who, on their part, bent towards the bottom of the boat as if they feared to touch him to whom Athos did not fear to extend his hand. Mordaunt made a last effort, raised himself up and seized tightly the hand outstretched towards him with the vehemence of despair.

"Good," said Athos ; "put your other hand here," and he offered him his shoulder as a second support, so that his head almost touched the head of Mordaunt, and the two mortal enemies were embraced like two brothers. Mordaunt clasped with closed fingers Athos's collar.

"Good, Monsieur!" said the count, "now you are saved; calm yourself."

"Ah, my mother!" exclaimed Mordaunt, with a fiery look, and in a tone of hate impossible to describe, "I can offer thee only one victim, but it shall at least be the one whom thou wouldst have chosen."

And while D'Artagnan uttered a loud cry, Porthos raised the oar, and Aramis sought a point for striking, a terrible toss given to the boat dragged Athos into the water, while Mordaunt, uttering a cry of triumph, clasped the neck of his victim, and for the purpose of paralyzing his movements encircled his limbs with his own as a serpent might have done.

For a moment, without cry or call for help, Athos tried to keep above water; but from the weight he gradually sank. Soon no more was seen than his long hair floating. Presently all disappeared; and a vast bubbling, which soon ceased, alone indicated the spot where both had become engulfed.

Dumb with horror, immovable, suffocated by indignation and fear, the three friends sat with open mouth, dilated eyes, extended arms; they looked like statues, but despite their immobility they could hear the beatings of their hearts. Porthos was the first to come to himself, and tearing his hair, "Oh!" he exclaimed, with a sob, especially terrible in such a man, — "oh, Athos, Athos! noble heart! Perdition to us who have let you die!"

"Oh, yes, perdition!" repeated D'Artagnan and Aramis.

At that moment, in the midst of a vast circle lighted up by the moon's rays four or five strokes' length from the boat, the same disturbance of the water which had told of the sinking took place again; and first the hair, then a pale face with open but lifeless eyes appeared,

then the body, which, rising as far as the bust above the sea, turned gently on its back, according to the caprice of the waves. In the breast of the corpse a poniard was buried, the gold handle of which glittered.

"Mordaunt! Mordaunt!" the three friends cried out; "it's Mordaunt!"

"But Athos?" said D'Artagnan.

Suddenly the boat gave a lurch to the left under a new and unexpected weight, and Grimaud uttered a cry of joy. They turned and saw Athos, livid, with dull eye and trembling hand, leaning on the boat's side. Eight strong arms raised him at once into the boat, where in a few seconds Athos felt himself growing warm and re-animated by the attentions and embraces of his friends, who were intoxicated with joy.

"You are not wounded, at least?" asked D'Artagnan.

"No — and he?"

"Oh, he, this time, God be thanked, is really dead! Look!" and D'Artagnan, forcing Athos to turn in the direction which he indicated, pointed to the body of Mordaunt floating on his back, sometimes submerged, sometimes afloat, and which seemed still to pursue the four friends with a look of insult and mortal hate. At last it sank. Athos followed it with an eye full of sorrow and pity.

"Bravo Athos!" cried Aramis, with an effusiveness very rare from him.

"A fine blow!" exclaimed Porthos.

"I had a son," said Athos; "I wished to live."

"At last," said D'Artagnan, "God has spoken!"

"It is not I who killed him," murmured Athos, "but destiny."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN WHICH IS TOLD HOW MOUSQUETON, AFTER HAVING MISSED BEING ROASTED, ESCAPED BEING EATEN.

Deep silence reigned for a long time in the boat after the terrible scene which we have just related. The moon, which had shone for a time, as if God intended that no details of this event should be hidden from the spectators' eyes, now disappeared behind the clouds. All again fell into that obscurity so terrifying in all solitudes, but especially in that liquid one called the ocean; and nothing was heard but the whistling of the west wind over the crest of the waves.

Porthos was the first to break the silence.

"I have seen a good many things," said he, "but nothing has moved me so much as that which I have just witnessed. Yet, disquieted as I am, I declare I feel very happy. I feel as if a hundred pounds were off my breast, and that at last I can breathe freely."

In fact, Porthos breathed with a noise which did honor to the powerful play of his lungs.

"I shall not say as much as you, Porthos," said Aramis. "I am still in a state of fright. I have reached the point of doubting the reality of what I have seen, and I look round the boat expecting every moment to see that wretch, holding in his hand the poniard which was in his heart."

"Don't be in a hurry to sing a Te Deum, Porthos," said D'Artagnan. "We have never encountered a greater

danger than the present one, — for one man gets the better of another, but it is not so with the elements. Now we are out at sea by night, without pilot, in a frail bark; if a blast of wind should upset us, we should be lost."

Mousqueton uttered a deep sigh.

"You are ungrateful, D'Artagnan," said Athos, — "yes, ungrateful, to doubt Providence just when it saves us in so miraculous a way. Do you believe that God would have helped us to escape so many perils just to abandon us now? No. We are borne along by a westerly breeze. There 's Charles's Wain, consequently France is over there. Let us keep before the wind, and it will drive us towards Calais or Boulogne. If the boat capsizes, we are strong enough, and good swimmers enough, at least five of us, to right it again, or to hold on if that is beyond our strength. Then we are in the course of ships from Dover to Calais, and from Portsmouth to Boulogne. It is then pretty certain that when day comes we shall fall in with some fishing-boat which will pick us up."

"But suppose we don't fall in with one, and that the wind should blow from the north?"

"That 's another thing," said Athos; "we shall then meet no land till we have crossed the Atlantic."

"Which means that we should die of hunger," replied Aramis.

"It is more than probable," said the Comte de la Fère.

Mousqueton breathed a sigh more dolorous than the first.

"Come, Mouston," asked Porthos, "what makes you keep on groaning so? It becomes tiresome."

"The fact is, I am very cold."

"That 's impossible," said Porthos. "Your body is covered with a layer of fat, which makes it impenetrable to the air. There is something else; speak out."

"Well, yes, Monsieur; it is this layer of fat on which you compliment me which frightens me."

"And why so, Mouston? Speak boldly; these gentlemen allow you."

"Because, Monsieur, I remember that in the library of the Château de Bracieux there are many books of travels, and among them those of Jean Mocquet, the famous navigator of King Henry IV."

"What then?"

"Well, he tells a good deal about adventures by sea, and events like that which are now threatening us."

"Go on, Mouston," said Porthos; "this comparison is full of interest to us."

"Well, Monsieur, in such a case famished voyagers, says Jean Mocquet, have the frightful practice of eating one another, and beginning with —"

"The fattest!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, who was not able to control his laughter in spite of the gravity of the situation.

"Yes, Monsieur," replied Mousqueton, astonished at this hilarity; "and permit me to say that I don't see anything laughable in the matter."

"This brave Mouston is devotion personified," replied Porthos. "Let us lay a bet that you see yourself already despatched and eaten by your master."

"Yes, Monsieur; although this pleasure which you imagine to be mine, is not, I confess, unmixed with sorrow. Yet I should not be very sorry, Monsieur, if by dying I felt sure of still being useful to you."

"Mouston," said Porthos, much affected; "if we ever see again my Château de Pierrefonds, you shall have, in fee simple for yourself and descendants, the vineyard which overlooks the farm."

"And you shall call it, 'Devotion Vineyard,' Mouston,"

said Aramis, "to transmit to future ages the recollection of your sacrifice."

"Chevalier," said D'Artagnan, laughing again, "you would have eaten some of Mouston without very much repugnance, would you not, especially after two or three days of abstinence?"

"Upon my word, no," replied Aramis; "I should much prefer Blaisois. We have known him much less time."

It is easily understood that during this interchange of fun, which was especially meant to divert Athos's thoughts from the scenes through which he had just passed, the servants did not feel quite at ease, except Grimaud, who knew that in any case he would be safe from this danger, however great it might be. So Grimaud, without taking part in the conversation, and silent as was his habit, was doing his best at rowing with an oar in each hand.

"You are rowing, then?" said Athos.

Grimaud signified that he was.

"Why do you row?"

"To keep warm."

In fact, while the others were shivering with cold, the silent Grimaud was all of a sweat.

Suddenly Mousqueton uttered a cry of joy, as he held a bottle above his head.

"Oh!" said he, passing the bottle to Porthos, — "oh, Monsieur, we are saved! the boat is supplied with eatables;" and fumbling quickly under the seat whence he had already drawn the valuable specimen, he took out in succession a dozen similar bottles, some bread, and a piece of salt beef. It is needless to say that this discovery restored liveliness to all except Athos.

"Confound it!" said Porthos, who was already hungry when he embarked on the felucca, "it is astonishing how

hungry the emotions make one!" and he emptied the bottle at a draught, and ate a good third of the bread and salt beef.

"Now," said Athos, "sleep, or try to sleep, Messieurs; I will watch."

For men different from these bold adventurers such a suggestion would have been out of derision. For in fact they were wet to the skin, and an icy wind was blowing; and the feelings which they had so lately experienced seemed to forbid sleep. But for their iron constitutions, with bodies inured to all fatigues, sleep in all circumstances came when called for without ever disobeying the call.

So in a very short time they all, full of confidence in their pilot, reclined as they were able, and tried to profit from the advice of Athos, who, seated at the rudder with eyes fixed on the sky, where doubtless he sought not only the route to France but the face of God, remained, as he had promised, thoughtful and awake, guiding the little boat in the right course.

After they had had some hours of sleep Athos awoke them. The first rays of morning had just lighted up the blue sea, and about ten gunshots off was seen a black mass, above which was spread a triangular sail, fine and long like a swallow's wing.

"A ship!" said the four friends with one voice, while the servants also expressed their joy in various keys.

It was in fact a Dunkirk bark sailing towards Boulogne.

The four masters, with Blaisois and Mousqueton, united their voices into one shout, which vibrated over the elastic surface of the waves, while Grimaud, without saying anything, put his hat on the end of his oar to attract the notice of the ship's crew.

A quarter of an hour after, the ship's boat took them in tow, and they stood on the ship's deck. Grimaud offered twenty guineas to the skipper on his master's behalf, and at nine o'clock, aided by a good wind, our Frenchmen set foot on their native soil.

"I say how strong one is upon this soil!" said Porthos, burying his large feet in the sand. "Let any one come to pick a quarrel with me now, and they will soon see whom they have to do with. I could defy a whole kingdom."

"And I beg of you," said D'Artagnan, "not to sound your note of defiance too loud, Porthos, for it seems to me that we are a good deal stared at by those close by."

"Why, of course," said Porthos, "they are admiring us."

"Ah, well! I am not at all proud of that, I assure you, Porthos; only I see some men dressed in black, and in our position men so dressed make me afraid, I confess."

"They are the customs clerks," said Aramis.

"Under the great cardinal," said Athos, "they would have paid more attention to us than to the merchandise; but under the present one, rest assured, my friends, they will do the reverse."

"I don't rely on them," said D'Artagnan; "and I shall get off to the sand-hills."

"Why not the town?" said Porthos. "I should prefer a good inn to those frightful deserts of sand which God has made only for rabbits. Besides, I am hungry."

"Do as you please, Porthos," said D'Artagnan; "but as for me, I am convinced of this, that nothing is safer for men in our position than the open country;" and D'Artagnan, sure of securing the majority, plunged among the sand-hills without waiting for Porthos's reply. The little troop soon disappeared without having attracted public attention.

"Now," said Aramis, when they had gone about a quarter of a league, "let us have a talk."

"No, no," said D'Artagnan; "let us flee. We have escaped Cromwell, Mordaunt, the sea, — those abysses which threatened to engulf us; we shall not escape Sieur Mazarin."

"You are right, D'Artagnan," said Aramis; "and my advice is, that for greater security we separate."

"Yes, yes," said D'Artagnan; "let us separate."

Porthos wished to speak in opposition to this resolution, but D'Artagnan made him understand by pressing his hand that he must be silent. Porthos was very obedient to his companion's signs, whose intellectual superiority he recognized with his usual good-nature. He checked, then, the words which he was on the point of speaking.

"But why should we separate?" said Athos.

"Because," said D'Artagnan, "Porthos and I were sent to Cromwell by M. de Mazarin, and instead of serving Cromwell, we have served King Charles I.; and that is not at all the same thing. By returning with MM. de la Fère and d'Herblay our crime is proved; by returning alone it remains in doubt, and by means of doubt one can deceive men a good deal. Now, I mean to lead M. de Mazarin a dance, — that I do."

"Come," said Porthos, "that's true."

"You forget," said Athos, "that we are your prisoners, that we do not regard ourselves as freed from our parole to you, and that in taking us as prisoners to Paris — "

"Really, Athos," broke in D'Artagnan, "I am sorry that a man of sense like you should be always talking of wretched things at which scholars of the third class would blush. Chevalier," continued D'Artagnan, speaking to Aramis, who, proudly resting on his sword, seemed, although he had at first expressed a contrary opinion, to

be at the first word won over to that of his companion, — "Chevalier, understand that in this, as is usually the case, my suspicious nature exaggerates. Porthos and I risk nothing, after all. But if by chance, however, they try to arrest us before you, well! they could not arrest seven men as they arrest three; swords would see the light, and the affair, bad for every one, would become an enormity which would ruin all four of us. Besides, if misfortune happens to two of us, then the other two are at liberty to do what they can to get the others released. And then who knows whether we shall not obtain separately — you from the queen, we from Mazarin — a pardon which they would have refused us unitedly? You, Athos and Aramis, go to the right. You, Porthos, to the left with me; leave these gentlemen to file off towards Normandy, and we to gain Paris by the shortest route."

"But if they seize us on the way, how can we mutually be informed of the catastrophe?" asked Aramis.

"Nothing easier," replied D'Artagnan; "let us agree on an itinerary from which we will not deviate. You take St. Valéry, then Dieppe, then the direct route from there to Paris. We will go by Abbeville, Amiens, Péronne, Compiègne, and Senlis; and at each house or inn where we stop we will write on the wall with a sharp-pointed knife, or on the window-pane with a diamond, a notice to guide the searches of those who may be free."

"Ah, my friend," said Athos, "how I should admire the resources of your head if I did not stop to adore those of your heart!" and he gave his hand to D'Artagnan.

"Has the fox cleverness, Athos?" said the Gascon, shrugging his shoulders. "No; he knows how to choke the poultry, track the huntsmen, and find his way back by day as by night, — that 's all. Well, is it settled?"

"It is settled."

"Then let us divide the money," replied D'Artagnan. "There ought to be a balance of about two hundred pistoles. Grimaud, how much is it?"

"A hundred and eighty half-louis, Monsieur."

"It's that, is it? Ah, hurrah! there's the sun. Good-day, friend sun! Although you are not the same as that of Gascony, I recognize you. Good-day; it's a long time since I have seen you."

"Come, come, D'Artagnan," said Athos, "don't assume a mock bravery; you have tears in your eyes already. Let us always be frank towards one another."

"Ah, but could you believe it possible, Athos, to leave without emotion, and at a time not without danger, two friends like you and Aramis?"

"No," said Athos; "so come to my arms, my son."

"Plague on it!" said Porthos, sobbing, "I believe I am crying. How foolish it is!"

These four men, united by brotherly bonds, were in fact but one soul at that moment.

Blaisois and Grimaud were to go with Athos and Aramis. Mousqueton sufficed for Porthos and D'Artagnan. They divided the money, as they had always done before, with fraternal exactness; then after having individually shaken hands and mutually reiterated the assurance of an eternal friendship, these four gentlemen separated to take the routes arranged, not without turning round and sending after one another loving words which the echoes repeated. At last they were lost to view.

"*Sacrebleu*, D'Artagnan!" said Porthos, "I must say this immediately, for I cannot keep anything in my heart against you, — I have not recognized you in this affair!"

"Why?" asked D'Artagnan, with his cunning smile.

"Because," said Porthos, "if, as you say, Athos and Aramis are in danger, this is not the time to leave them. I confess that I was quite ready to follow them, in spite of all the Mazarins on earth."

"You would be right, Porthos, if this were the case. But remember one small fact, which, small though it be, will quite change your views; it is that it is not those gentlemen who run the gravest danger, but ourselves. It is not to abandon them that we leave them, but so as not to compromise them."

"Really?" said Porthos, opening his great eyes in astonishment.

"Yes, doubtless; if they are arrested, they will simply get put into the Bastille; but if we are, we shall be hanged in the Place de Grève."

"Oh, oh!" said Porthos; "that's a long way from the baron's coronet that you promised me, D'Artagnan."

"Bah! not so far as you may think perhaps, Porthos; you know the proverb: 'Every road leads to Rome.'"

"But how is it we are running greater dangers than Athos and Aramis?"

"Because they have simply executed the mission which they received from Queen Henrietta, and we have betrayed that which we received from Mazarin; instead of helping in the fall of Charles's royal head, condemned by those rascals whom they call MM. Mazarin, Cromwell, Joyce, Pride, Fairfax, etc., we nearly saved him."

"Upon my word, that's true," said Porthos; "but how can you suppose that in the midst of these great affairs, General Cromwell had time to think of—"

"Cromwell thinks of everything, has time for everything; and believe me, my dear friend, we must not lose ours, for it is precious. We shall not be safe until after seeing Mazarin and yet—"

"The devil!" said Porthos; "and what shall we say to Mazarin?"

"Leave that to me. I have a plan; they laugh best who laugh last. M. Mazarin is very tricky; M. Cromwell is very strong. But I would rather deal with them than with the late M. Mordaunt."

"Stop," said Porthos, "it is very pleasant to say the '*late* M. Mordaunt.'"

"Upon my word, yes; but now let us be off!" And they both, without losing an instant, took the road to Paris, followed by Mousqueton, who, after having been too cold all night, was already too hot at the end of a quarter of an hour.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE RETURN.

Athos and Aramis followed the course marked out for them by D'Artagnan, and travelled as fast as they could. They thought it would be more advantageous for them to be stopped near Paris than far from it. Every evening they traced, either on the walls or on the windows, the sign of recognition agreed on; but every morning they awoke free, to their great astonishment.

As they approached Paris, the great events in which they had taken part, and which had revolutionized England, faded away as dreams, while on the other hand those which during their absence had stirred France came before them.

During their six weeks' absence so many small events had taken place that unitedly they made up a great event.

The Parisians, on awaking in the morning without queen, without king, were much troubled by this abandonment; and the absence of Mazarin, so warmly desired, did not compensate for that of the two illustrious fugitives.

The first feeling which Paris experienced on learning the flight to St. Germain — a flight which we have described to our readers — was that sort of fright which seizes hold of children when they wake up in the night or in solitude. The parliament was aroused, and it was decided that a deputation should be sent to the queen to pray her no longer to deprive Paris of her royal presence.

But the queen was still under the twofold influence of the victory of Lens, and the satisfaction from her flight so successfully executed. The deputies not only were not received by her, but were made to wait on the high-road where the Chancellor Séguier — the same chancellor whom we have seen in the first part of this work pursue so obstinately a letter into the very corset of the queen — came to bring them the ultimatum of the court, declaring that if the parliament did not humble themselves before royalty by passing condemnation on all the questions which had led to the quarrel between them, Paris would be besieged the next day; that even already, in the expectation of that siege, the Duc d'Orléans was holding St. Cloud bridge; and that Monsieur the Prince, illustrious from his victory at Lens, held Charenton and St. Denis.

Unfortunately for the court, to whom a moderate reply would have restored a good number of partisans, this threatening answer produced an effect contrary to the one expected. It wounded the pride of the parliament, which, feeling itself strongly supported by the citizens, to whom the pardon of Broussel had shown their strength, replied to these letters-patent by declaring that Cardinal Mazarin, being notoriously the author of all these disorders, was the enemy of the king and the State, ordered him to withdraw from the court the same day, and from France in a week, and should he not obey, enjoined all the king's subjects to attack him.

This energetic response, which the court had by no means anticipated, put both Paris and Mazarin beyond the law. It remained only to be known who would gain the mastery, the parliament or the court.

The court thereupon made preparations for attacking, and Paris for defence. The citizens were engaged in the usual work of citizens in times of riot, — that is to say, in

stretching chains and unpaving streets, — when they saw arriving for their assistance, conducted by the Coadjutor, M. le Prince de Conti, brother of M. le Prince de Condé, and M. le Duc de Longueville, his brother-in-law. This gave them confidence, for besides two princes of the blood, they had the advantage of numbers. It was the 10th of January when this unhoped for aid came to the Parisians.

After a stormy discussion, M. le Prince de Conti was named generalissimo of the king's armies out of Paris, with MM. les Ducs d'Elbeuf and de Bouillon, and le Maréchal de la Mothe for lieutenants-general. The Duc de Longueville, without office or title, was satisfied with assisting his brother-in-law.

M. de Beaufort had come from the Vendômois, bringing, says the chronicle, his haughty look, his fine long hair, and that popularity which was tantamount to the royalty of the markets.

The Parisian army had been organized with that promptitude which the citizens exhibit in making soldiers of themselves when they are driven to it by some impulse or other. On the nineteenth the improvised army tried a *sortie*, rather for self-assurance and the assurance of others of their real existence than to attempt anything serious, flying above their heads a flag on which was this singular device: "We seek our king."

The following days were employed in small operations, which effected nothing else than the capture of some flocks and the burning of two or three houses.

This brings us to the early days of February, and it was on the first that our four companions landed at Boulogne, and took their respective courses towards Paris.

Towards the end of the fourth day of their journey, they carefully avoided Nanterre, so as not to fall into the hands of the queen's party. It was quite against the grain for

Athos to take all these precautions; but Aramis had very judiciously remarked that they had no right to be imprudent, and that the mission received from King Charles at the foot of the scaffold would only terminate at the feet of the queen. Athos therefore agreed.

At the faubourgs our travellers found a strong guard; all Paris was armed. The sentinel refused to let them pass, and called the sergeant. The sergeant came out at once with all the importance which citizens assume when clothed with any military dignity.

"Who are you, Messieurs?" he asked.

"Two gentlemen," replied Athos.

"Whence do you come?"

"From London."

"What have you come to do at Paris?"

"To execute a mission to her Majesty the Queen of England."

"Ah, yes! everybody is going nowadays to the Queen of England. We have already here three gentlemen whose passes we are examining, and they are going to her Majesty. Where are yours?"

"We have none."

"How so? you have none?"

"No; we are from England, as we have told you. We are completely ignorant of the state of political affairs, having left Paris before the king's departure."

"Ah!" said the sergeant, with a knowing look, "you are of Mazarin's party, who want to gain admittance to act as spies."

"My dear friend," said Athos, who had hitherto allowed Aramis to make the replies, "if we were Mazarin's partisans we should, on the contrary, have all the necessary passes. In your present situation, believe me, you should above all be suspicious of those who are perfectly in rule."

"Go to the guard-room; explain matters to the commanding officer."

The sergeant made a sign to the sentinel, who put himself in line; the sergeant passed first, the two gentlemen followed him to the guard-room.

This guard-room was quite filled by citizens and men of the lower class; some gambling, others drinking, others again speechifying.

In a corner, almost out of sight, were the three gentlemen who had come first, whose passes the officer was examining. This officer was in the next room, the importance of his rank conceding to him the honor of a private apartment.

The first act both of the newly arrived and the earlier comers was, to cast a rapid, searching glance at one another from the ends of the guard-room. The first comers were covered with long cloaks in which they were carefully wrapped. One of them, not so tall as his companions, kept in the background in the shade.

When the sergeant, on entering, announced that in all probability he was bringing in two partisans of Mazarin, the three gentlemen listened very attentively. The shortest of these, who had advanced a few paces, retired again into the shade.

On learning that the new-comers had no passes, the unanimous opinion of the guard seemed to be not to give them permission to enter Paris.

"Indeed," said Athos, "it is probable, on the contrary, that we shall enter, for we seem to have to do with reasonable people. Now, a very simple thing needs be done; send our names to her Majesty the Queen of England, and if she become answerable for us, I hope you will kindly let us pass freely."

At these words the attention of the gentleman in the background increased, and was accompanied by such marks

of surprise that his hat, pushed back by the cloak which he more carefully drew around him, fell off, he stooped, and picked it up quickly.

"Oh, good heavens!" said Aramis, jogging Athos's elbow; "did you notice him?"

"Notice what?"

"The shortest of the three gentlemen?"

"No."

"It seemed to me to be — but it 's impossible."

Just then the sergeant came out of the room of the officer of the guard, and pointing out the three gentlemen, to whom he gave a paper, "The passes are correct," said he; "let these three gentlemen pass."

The three gentlemen gave a nod, and hastened to make use of the permission to go on their way.

Aramis followed them with his eyes, and just as the shortest passed by him, he pressed Athos's hand.

"What 's the matter, my dear fellow?" the latter asked.

"I have — it 's a dream, doubtless."

Then addressing the sergeant, "Tell me, Monsieur," he added, "do you know those three gentlemen who have just left?"

"I know them from their passes; they are MM. de Flamarens, de Châtillon, and de Bruy, — three Frondeurs who wish to join M. de Longueville."

"That 's strange," said Aramis, answering his own thoughts rather than the sergeant; "I thought I recognized Mazarin himself."

The sergeant burst out laughing.

"He!" said he, "to venture thus among us to be hanged! — not such a fool!"

"Ah!" muttered Aramis, "I may be deceived. I have not D'Artagnan's infallible eye."

"Who here talks of D'Artagnan?" asked the officer, who at this moment appeared at the door of the room.

"Oh!" uttered Grimaud, opening his eyes.

"What?" Aramis and Athos asked at the same time.

"Planchet!" replied Grimaud; "Planchet with the high collar."

"MM. de la Fère and d'Herblay," exclaimed the officer, "come back to Paris! How delighted I am, Messieurs! for doubtless you are going to join Messieurs the Princes."

"As you see, my dear Planchet," said Aramis, while Athos was smiling, seeing the important grade occupied in the citizen soldiery by the old comrade of Mousqueton, of Bazin, and of Grimaud.

"And M. d'Artagnan, of whom you made mention just now, M. d'Herblay, might I venture to ask if you have any news of him?"

"We left him four days ago, and were led to believe that he had reached Paris before us."

"No, Monsieur, I am quite certain he is not in Paris; perhaps he has stopped at St. Germain."

"I do not think so; he was to have met us at the Hôtel de la Chevrette."

"I passed there to-day."

"And the fair Madeleine, had she no news of him?" asked Aramis, smiling.

"No, Monsieur; I will not hide from you that she even seemed very much distressed."

"Indeed," said Aramis, "we have lost no time. Allow me, my dear Athos, without further inquiries about our friend, to make my compliments to M. Planchet."

"Ah, Monsieur the Chevalier!" said Planchet, bowing.

"Lieutenant?" said Aramis.

"Lieutenant, and promise of being captain."

"That 's very fortunate; and how is it these honors have come to you?"

"First of all, you know, Messieurs, that I helped M. de Rochefort to escape."

"Yes, indeed; he has told us all about that."

"I nearly got hanged by Mazarin on that occasion, and this has naturally made me more popular than I was."

"And thanks to this popularity — "

"No, thanks to something better; you know, besides, that I served in the regiment of Piedmont, where I had the honor of being sergeant."

"Yes."

"Well, one day no one was able to make a crowd of armed citizens keep rank, some starting with the left foot first, some with the right. I succeeded in making them start with the same foot; and I was made lieutenant at once on the parade ground."

"There 's the explanation," said Aramis.

"So," said Athos, "you have a crowd of nobility with you?"

"Indeed, yes! We have first of all, as you may perhaps know, M. le Prince de Conti, M. le Duc de Longueville, M. le Duc de Beaufort, M. le Duc d'Elbeuf, the Duc de Bouillon, the Duc de Chevreuse, M. de Brissac, the Maréchal de la Mothe, M. de Luynes, the Marquis de Vitry, the Prince de Marcillac, the Marquis de Noirmoutiers, the Comte de Fiesque, the Marquis de Laigues, the Comte de Montrésor, the Marquis de Sévigné — whom do I know besides?"

"And M. Raoul de Bragelonne?" asked Athos, in a voice full of emotion; "D'Artagnan told me that he recommended him to your care when he left."

"Yes, Monsieur the Count, as if he were his own son;

and I must say that he has not been out of my sight a moment."

"Then," replied Athos, in a joyful voice, "he is quite well? No accident has befallen him?"

"None, Monsieur."

"And he is staying —"

"At the Charlemagne Hôtel, still."

"He passes his time —"

"Sometimes at the Queen of England's, sometimes with Madame de Chevreuse. He and the Comte de Guiche are inseparables."

"Thanks, Planchet," said Athos, giving him his hand.

"Oh, Monsieur the Count!" said Planchet, touching his hand with the tips of his fingers.

"Well, what are you doing, then, Count? to an old lackey!" said Aramis.

"Friend," said Athos, "he gives me news of Raoul."

"And now, Messieurs, what do you intend doing?" asked Planchet, who did not hear the remark.

"Entering Paris, if you can grant us permission, my dear M. Planchet."

"What! if I will give you permission? You are laughing at me, Monsieur the Count; I am nothing else than your servant," and he bowed. Then turning to his men, "Let these gentlemen pass," said he. "I know them; they are friends of M. de Beaufort."

"Long live M. de Beaufort!" cried all the post with one voice, opening the way for Athos and Aramis.

The sergeant alone approached Planchet, "What! without passport?" he muttered.

"Without passport," said Planchet.

"Mind, Captain," he added, giving Planchet in advance his promised rank, — "mind; one of the three men who

left just now told me in a whisper to be on my guard against these gentlemen."

"I," said Planchet, with dignity, — "I know them, and am responsible."

Having said that, he shook Grimaud by the hand, who seemed honored by the distinction.

"Au revoir, then, Captain," said Aramis, in his bantering tone; "if anything happens to us, we shall make use of your name."

"Monsieur," said Planchet, "in that as in everything, I am still your servant."

"The fellow has much wit," said Aramis, mounting his horse.

"And why should he not," said Athos, "after having for so long a time brushed his master's hats?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE AMBASSADORS.

The two friends set off at once, descending the rapid slope of the faubourg; but at the bottom of it they saw with astonishment that the streets had become rivers and the squares lakes. In consequence of the heavy rains during January the Seine had overflowed and flooded half the capital.

Athos and Aramis bravely entered the waters with their horses, but the latter were soon up to their chests. The gentlemen therefore had to dismount and take a boat, which they did, after ordering their servants to go and wait for them at the markets.

They therefore reached the Louvre in a boat. It was quite night, and Paris, thus seen by the light of pale lanterns flickering among these ponds which were being crossed by boats loaded with patrols carrying their glittering arms, with the watchwords exchanged between the posts, presented an appearance which quite bewildered Aramis, a man so easily influenced by warlike emotions.

They reached the queen's apartments, but were obliged to wait, as her Majesty was that very moment giving audience to some gentlemen, who were bearers of news from England.

"And we also," said Athos to the servant who brought the answer, "not only bring news from England, but have just come from there."

"What are your names, Messieurs?" the servant asked.

"M. le Comte de la Fère and M. le Chevalier d'Herblay."

"Ah! in that case, Messieurs," said the servant, hearing those names which the queen had so many times pronounced in her hope, "it is quite another thing; and I believe her Majesty would not pardon me for keeping you waiting a moment. Follow me, I pray you."

On reaching the queen's apartment he opened the door.

"Madame," said he, "I hope your Majesty will pardon me for having disobeyed your orders when you learn that these gentlemen are the Comte de la Fère and the Chevalier d'Herblay."

At these two names the queen uttered a cry of joy, which the gentlemen heard from the place where they had waited.

"Poor queen!" murmured Athos.

"Oh, let them come in!" exclaimed the princess, hastening to the door.

The poor child did not leave her mother, and tried to make her forget by her filial cares the absence of her two brothers and of her sister.

"Come in, come in, Messieurs," said she, herself opening the door.

Athos and Aramis entered. The queen was seated in an armchair, and before her, standing, were two of the three gentlemen whom they had met in the guard-room. These were M. de Flamarens and M. Gaspard de Coligny, Duc de Châtillon, brother of the one who was killed in a duel seven or eight years before in a matter respecting Madame de Longueville.

At the announcement of the two friends they withdrew a step, and exchanged some words in a low voice, being evidently ill at ease.

"Well, Messieurs," exclaimed the queen, on seeing

Athos and Aramis, "you are come at last, my faithful friends; but the messengers of the State are here before you. The court was informed of the state of affairs in London just when you reached the gates of Paris; and these two gentlemen are come from her Majesty, Queen Anne of Austria, to give me the latest news."

Aramis and Athos looked at each other; this tranquillity, this joy even, which appeared in the queen's looks, quite stupefied them.

"Be pleased to go on," said she, addressing MM. de Flamarens and de Châtillon; "you were saying just now that his Majesty, Charles I., had been condemned to death, contrary to the wishes of the majority of his subjects."

"Yes, Madame," stammered Châtillon.

Aramis and Athos looked more and more astonished at each other.

"And that led to the scaffold," continued the queen, — "oh, my Lord! he has been saved by the indignant people?"

"Yes, Madame," replied Châtillon, in so low a voice that the two gentlemen, though very attentive, could scarcely hear this affirmation.

The queen clasped her hands together in abundant gratitude, while her daughter threw her arms round her mother's neck, and embraced her with tears of joy in her eyes.

"Now we have nothing more to do but present to your Majesty our humble respects," said Châtillon, to whom this *rôle* seemed very burdensome, and who blushed when he met the fixed, piercing look of Athos.

"One moment more, Messieurs," said the queen, detaining them by a gesture. "One moment, please, for here are MM. de la Fère and d'Herblay, who are come from

London, and who will perhaps give us those ocular proofs with which you are unacquainted. You will convey these to the queen, my dear sister. Speak, Messieurs; I am listening. Hide nothing. Since his Majesty is still living, and his royal honor is safe, all else is to me indifferent."

Athos turned pale, and put his hand to his heart.

"Well," said the queen, who noticed this movement and paleness; "speak, Monsieur, I beg of you."

"I beg pardon, Madame," said Athos, "but I do not wish to add anything to the recital of these gentlemen before they have acknowledged that perhaps they are mistaken."

"Mistaken!" exclaimed the queen, almost suffocated, — "mistaken! what has taken place, then? Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

"Monsieur," said M. de Flamarens to Athos, "if we are mistaken, the mistake is on the queen's part; and you would not presume, I suppose, to put it right, — for that would be to give the lie to her Majesty."

"'On the queen's part,' Monsieur?" replied Athos, with his calm, thrilling voice.

"Yes," muttered Flamarens, looking down.

Athos sighed sorrowfully.

"Is it not rather on the part of him who accompanied you, and whom we saw along with you in the guard-room at the Barrière du Roule, that the mistake originates?" said Aramis, with freezing politeness. "For if we are not deceived, there were three of you who came into Paris."

Châtillon and Flamarens trembled.

"But explain yourself, Count," exclaimed the queen, whose distress increased every moment. "On your face I read despair. Your mouth hesitates to tell some ter-

rible news; your hands tremble. Oh, God! what has happened?"

"Lord," said the princess, falling on her knees near her mother, "have pity upon us!"

"Monsieur," said Châtillon, "if you are the bearer of sad news, you will act cruelly in telling it to the queen."

Aramis approached M. de Châtillon so as almost to touch him.

"Monsieur," said he to him, with pinched lips and flashing eyes, "you have not, I suppose, the pretension to teach M. le Comte de la Fère and myself what we have to say here?"

During this short altercation Athos, still with hand on his heart and inclined head, drew near the queen, and in a trembling voice, "Madame," he said, "princes, who are by their natures above other men, have been endowed with hearts able to support greater misfortunes than those of common people, — for their hearts partake of their superiority. One should not then, as it seems to me, treat a great queen like your Majesty in the same manner as a woman of our condition O queen, fated to suffer martyrdom on this earth, here is the result of the mission with which you honored us!"

And Athos, kneeling before the trembling queen, drew from his breast, in the same case, the Order set in diamonds which the queen had intrusted to Lord de Winter, and the wedding-ring which Charles had delivered to Aramis. He opened the box, and handed them to the queen with a mute, deep grief.

The queen took the ring, put it convulsively to her lips, and without power to utter a sigh or articulate a sob, she extended her arms, became pale, and fell unconscious into those of her maids and daughter.

Athos kissed the hem of the robe of the unhappy

widow, and then rising with a dignity which made a profound impression on those present, "I, Comte de la Fère," said he, "a gentleman who has never told a lie, swear first before God, and then before this poor queen, that all that could be done to save the king, we have done on the soil of England. Now, Chevalier," added he, turning to D'Herblay, "let us go; our duty is completed."

"Not yet," said Aramis; "one word must be spoken to these gentlemen."

And turning towards Châtillon, "Monsieur," he said to him, "will you be good enough not to go before you hear what I wish to say to you out of the queen's presence?"

Châtillon bowed, but did not speak his assent. Athos and Aramis passed out first; the other two followed. They said not a word until they reached a terrace level with a window. Aramis went towards it; at the window he stopped, and turning towards the Duc de Châtillon, "Monsieur," he said to him, "you took the liberty just now, it seems to me, of treating us very cavalierly. That is not pleasant under any circumstances, still less on the part of persons who come to bring the queen the message of a liar."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Châtillon.

"What have you done then with M. de Bruy?" Aramis ironically asked. "Has he not gone to disguise himself because he is too much like M. de Mazarin? We know that there is at the Palais-Royal a good number of spare Italian masks, from Harlequin to Pantaloon."

"But you are challenging us, I think?" said Flamarens.

"Ah! you are not certain, Messieurs?"

"Chevalier! Chevalier!" said Athos.

"Eh! let me alone, now," said Aramis, petulantly; "you know very well I don't like things to be only half done."

"Finish it, then, Monsieur," said Châtillon, with a haughtiness which by no means yielded to that of Aramis.

Aramis bowed.

"Messieurs," said he, "any one else would arrest you, for we have some friends in Paris; but we offer you a means of leaving without being disturbed. Come and talk with us for five minutes, sword in hand, upon this secluded terrace."

"Willingly," said Châtillon.

"One moment, Messieurs," exclaimed Flamarens. "I admit that the proposal is tempting; but it is impossible at this hour to accept it."

"And why is it?" said Aramis, in his bantering way. "Is it the nearness of Mazarin which makes you so cautious?"

"Oh! you hear, Flamarens?" said Châtillon; "not to reply would be a blot on my name and honor."

"That 's my opinion," said Aramis, coldly.

"You will not answer, however, and these gentlemen very soon will be, I am sure of it, of my opinion."

Aramis shook his head with an insolent gesture of incredulity.

Châtillon saw this gesture, and carried his hand to his sword.

"Duke," said Flamarens, "you forget that to-morrow you command a most important expedition, and one ordered by Monsieur the Prince, approved by the queen; till to-morrow evening you are not at your own disposal."

"Be it so; on the morning of the day after to-morrow, then," said Aramis.

"That 's a long way off," said Châtillon.

"It is not I," said Aramis, "who ask this delay, and

who fix this term; so much the more, as it seems to me, that we might be able to meet in this expedition."

"Yes, Monsieur, you are right," exclaimed Châtillon; "I will meet you with great pleasure to-morrow if you will take the trouble to come as far as the gates of Charenton."

"Yes, Monsieur; to have the honor of meeting you I would go to the end of the world; much more will I go one or two leagues."

"Well, to-morrow, Monsieur!"

"I shall reckon on it. Go away then to join your cardinal. But previously swear on your honor not to inform him of our return."

"Conditions?"

"Why not?"

"Because it is for the victors to propose them; and you are not so yet, Messieurs."

"Then let us fight at once. It is quite the same to us who do not command the expedition of to-morrow."

Châtillon and Flamarens looked at each other. There was so much irony in Aramis's words and gestures that Châtillon especially had great difficulty to restrain his wrath. But on a word from Flamarens he checked himself.

"Well, let it be so," said he; "our companion, whoever he is, shall know nothing of what has passed. But you really promise to find me to-morrow at Charenton, do you not?"

"Yes," said Aramis, "rest assured about that, Messieurs."

The four gentlemen bowed, but this time Châtillon and Flamarens left the Louvre first, and the others followed.

"What is the meaning of all this fury, Aramis?" asked Athos.

"Eh! *pardieu!* I have to do with those I blame."

"What have they done to you?"

"They have done — You have n't seen them?"

"No."

"They sneered when we swore that we had done our duty in England. Now, they believed it, or they did not. They sneered to insult us. If they did not believe it, the insult was the greater; and it is well to show them that we are good for something. But I am not sorry that they have put off the affair till to-morrow. I think we have something better to do this evening than to draw the sword."

"What have we to do?"

"Eh! why, we have to effect the capture of Mazarin."

Athos contemptuously protruded his lips.

"These expeditions don't suit me, you know, Aramis."

"Why not?"

"Because they resemble surprises."

"Really, Athos, you would be a strange commander-in-chief! You would fight only in broad daylight. You would inform the enemy of the hour at which you would attack; and you would carefully avoid attempting anything by night, for fear of being accused of having profited by the darkness."

Athos smiled. "You know that a man cannot change his nature; besides, do you know where we are, and whether the seizure of Mazarin would not be an evil rather than a good, — an embarrassment and not a triumph?"

"Say at once, Athos, that you disapprove of my suggestion."

"By no means; I think, on the contrary, that it is fair warfare, yet — "

"Yet, what?"

"I think you ought not to have made those gentlemen promise to say nothing to Mazarin, for in doing that, you have already made an engagement to do nothing."

"Not at all, I swear; I regard myself as perfectly free. Come, come, Athos, let us go."

"Where?"

"To M. de Beaufort or to M. de Bouillon; we will tell them about it."

"Yes, but on one condition; that we begin with the Coadjutor. He is a priest; he is learned in casuistry, and we will tell our case to him."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "he will spoil everything, will appropriate all to himself; let us take him last instead of first."

Athos smiled. It was clear there was a thought in his mind which he did not express.

"Well, let it be so; with which shall we begin?"

"With M. de Bouillon, if you don't mind; he is the nearest to where we are now."

"Now, you will allow me to do one thing, will you not?"

"What is it?"

"Let me go first to the Charlemagne Hôtel to embrace Raoul."

"Why, of course! I will go with you for the same purpose."

They took the boat which had brought them, and reached the markets. There they found Grimaud and Blaisois in charge of the horses, and all four went off to Rue Guénégaud. But Raoul was not there; he had received a message from Monsieur the Prince, and had set off with Olivain immediately after having received it.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE THREE LIEUTENANTS OF THE GENERALISSIMO.

According to arrangement Athos and Aramis, on leaving the Charlemagne Hôtel, took their way to the mansion of M. le Duc de Bouillon. The night was very dark ; and although its silent hours were close at hand, yet still were heard those thousand noises which are especially audible in a city in a state of siege. At every step barricades were encountered ; at each winding of the streets chains were outstretched ; at the cross-roads were bivouacs of armed men ; patrols were passing up and down ; messengers sent by the various chiefs were crossing the public squares ; and lastly, animated dialogues which indicated the mental agitation were going on between the peaceful inhabitants, who were at the windows, and their more warlike fellow-citizens, who circulated in the streets armed with partisans and arquebuses.

Athos and Aramis had not gone a hundred yards before they were stopped by the sentinels in charge of the barricades, who demanded the watchword ; but they replied that they were going to M. de Bouillon to tell him news of importance, and the sentinels were satisfied by furnishing them with a guide, who, with the professed purpose of facilitating their course, was charged to keep a watch over them.

This guide started off preceding them and singing, —

> "This brave M. de Bouillon
> Is troubled with the gout."

It was one of the newest triolets, and was composed of

I don't know how many couplets, in which every one was mentioned.

On reaching the neighborhood of Bouillon's mansion, they passed a small troop of three cavaliers who had all the pass-words, for they marched without guide or escort, and on reaching barricades had only to exchange some words with the guards, and they were at once allowed to pass with all the signs of respect which were doubtless due to their rank.

On seeing them Athos and Aramis stopped.

"Oh, oh!" said Aramis, "do you see, Count?"

"Yes," said Athos.

"What do you think of these three cavaliers?"

"And you, Aramis?"

"Why, that they are our men."

"You are not mistaken. I am sure I recognized M. de Flamarens."

"So did I M. de Châtillon."

"As for the cavalier in a brown cloak — "

"That 's the cardinal himself. How the devil durst they venture into the neighborhood of Bouillon's house?" asked Aramis.

Athos smiled, but said nothing. Five minutes after, they knocked at the prince's door.

The door was guarded by a sentinel, as is the custom among people of high rank. There was also a little post in the courtyard, ready to obey the orders of the lieutenant of M. le Prince de Conti. As said the song, M. le Duc de Bouillon had the gout, and was keeping his bed; but in spite of this serious indisposition, which had prevented him for a month from riding, — that is to say, since Paris had been in a state of siege, — he was nevertheless ready to receive MM. le Comte de la Fère and le Chevalier d'Herblay.

The two friends were shown into the patient's bedroom, for, though in bed, he was surrounded by the most warlike surroundings possible. There were in all directions hung on the walls swords, pistols, cuirasses, and arquebuses, and it was easy to see that when the gout should leave him, M. de Bouillon would cut out some work for the enemies of parliament. Meanwhile, to his deep regret, he said, he was forced to keep his bed.

"Ah, Messieurs!" he exclaimed, on seeing his visitors, and making an effort to rise up in bed which drew from him a doleful grimace, "you are very fortunate. You can ride, go, come, and fight for the people's cause. But you see me nailed to my bed. Hang the gout!" said he, making a grimace again.

"Monseigneur," said Athos, "we have come from England; and our first care on reaching Paris has been to obtain news of your health."

"Many thanks, Messieurs, many thanks! My health is bad, as you see — Confound the gout! So you come from England? And King Charles is well, so I have just learned?"

"He is dead, Monseigneur," said Aramis.

"Bah!" exclaimed the duke, astonished.

"Died on the scaffold, condemned by Parliament."

"Impossible!"

"And executed in our presence."

"What then did M. de Flamarens tell me?"

"M. de Flamarens?" said Aramis.

"Yes; he has just left."

Athos smiled.

"With two companions?" said he.

"Yes," replied the duke; then he added with some uneasiness, "you must have met them."

"Well, yes, in the street, I believe," said Athos; and

smiling, he looked at Aramis, who in his turn looked at him with some astonishment.

"Confound this gout!" cried Bouillon, evidently ill at ease.

"Monseigneur," said Athos, "it needs all your devotedness to the cause of the Parisians to remain in command of troops, suffering as you are; and this perseverance of yours commands the admiration of M. d'Herblay and myself."

"How can it be helped, Messieurs? One must sacrifice oneself to the public good. You are both examples of this, — you, so brave and devoted, to whom my dear colleague, the Duc de Beaufort, owes his liberty, and perhaps his life; but I confess I have got to the end of my strength. Heart and head are good, but this confounded gout is killing me; and I confess that if the court would do justice to my lawful demands, since I simply ask the indemnity promised by the former cardinal himself when I was deprived of my principality of Sedan, — yes, if they would give me domains of equal value, and indemnify me for the loss of eight years' non-enjoyment of that possession; if, too, the title of prince were granted to my heirs, and if my brother Turenne were restored to his command, — I would retire at once to my estates, and leave the court and parliament to arrange matters the best way they could."

"And you would be quite right, Monseigneur," said Athos.

"It is your opinion, is it not, M. le Comte de la Fère?"

"Entirely."

"That 's your opinion also, is it not, M. le Chevalier d'Herblay?"

"Decidedly."

"Well, I assure you, Messieurs, that in all probability I shall adopt this plan. The court has made overtures to me; it rests with me to accept them. I have up to this

moment rejected them; but since men of your position tell me I am wrong, since too this dreadful gout makes it impossible for me to render any service to the cause of the Parisians, upon my word I have a good mind to follow your advice, and accept the proposal that M. de Châtillon has just made me."

"Accept it, Prince," said Aramis, "accept it."

"Upon my word, yes. I am very sorry to have almost rejected it this evening; but there is to be a conference to-morrow, and we shall see."

The two friends bade the duke good-by.

"Go, Messieurs," the latter said to them; "you must be very fatigued with the journey. Poor King Charles! But the fault was partly his own, and what ought to console us is that France has nothing to reproach herself with in this matter, and that she did all she could to save him."

"Oh! as to that," said Aramis, "we are witnesses of it, — M. de Mazarin especially."

"Ah, well! I am glad to hear you give this testimony; he has some good in him after all, — the cardinal; and if he were not a foreigner — well, one ought to do him justice! Ah! confound the gout!"

Athos and Aramis left, but M. de Bouillon's cries reached them even in the anteroom; it was clear he was suffering acutely.

On reaching the door leading into the street, "Well! Athos," asked Aramis, "what do you think about —"

"About whom?"

"Why, M. de Bouillon, of course."

"My friend, I think of him what the triolet of our guide thinks," replied Athos, —

"'This poor M. de Bouillon
Is troubled with the gout.'"

"You see," said Aramis, "that I did not breathe a word of the object which took us here."

"And you acted wisely; you would have caused him a fresh attack. Let us go next to M. de Beaufort's;" and the two friends went towards the Hôtel de Vendôme. Ten o'clock struck as they reached it.

The Hôtel de Vendôme was not less well guarded, and presented a not less warlike aspect than the Hôtel de Bouillon. There were sentinels posted in the court, arms piled, horses ready saddled and fastened to rings. Two cavaliers, leaving just as Athos and Aramis entered, were obliged to draw back a little to let the others pass.

"Ah, ah, Messieurs!" said Aramis, "this is decidedly a night of meetings. I confess that we should be very unfortunate after having met so frequently this evening if we did not succeed in meeting you to-morrow."

"Oh, as to that, Monsieur," replied Châtillon (for it was he who with Flamarens had just left the Duc de Beaufort), "your mind may be at rest; if we have met so often at night without seeking to do so, greater reason is there for our meeting you in the day when looking for you."

"I hope so, Monsieur," said Aramis.

"And I am sure of it," said the duke.

They then went their respective ways. Scarcely had Athos and Aramis given their horses' bridles to their servants, and taken off their cloaks, before a man approached them, who, after having looked at them by the dubious brightness of a lantern hanging in the court-yard, uttered a cry of surprise, and threw himself into their arms.

"Comte de la Fère," exclaimed this man, "Chevalier d'Herblay, — what, are you here in Paris?"

"Rochefort!" said the two friends together.

"Yes, no doubt. We are come, as you see, from the Vendômois, and are prepared to give Mazarin some work to do. You are still of our party, I suppose?"

"More than ever. And the duke?"

"He is mad against the cardinal. You know his success. He is the real king of Paris; he cannot go out without risk of being squeezed to death by the crowds."

"Ah, so much the better," said Aramis; "but tell me, was it not MM. de Flamarens and de Châtillon who left just now?"

"Yes; they came to have an audience with the duke. They came doubtless from Mazarin; but they have found out with whom they have to talk, I'll answer for it."

"All in good time!" said Athos. "And might one be allowed the honor of seeing his Highness?"

"Of course, this very instant. You know he will always see you. Follow me; I desire the honor of presenting you."

Rochefort went on before. All the doors opened to him and his two friends. They found M. de Beaufort ready to sit down to table. The numerous occupations of the evening had delayed supper till then; but in spite of the importance of this duty to his stomach the prince had no sooner heard the two names pronounced by Rochefort than he rose from the chair on which he had just seated himself, and advancing towards the two friends, "Oh, you are welcome, Messieurs," said he. "You have come to take supper, have you not? Boisjoli, just tell Noirmont that I have two visitors. You remember Noirmont, don't you, Messieurs? He is my steward, the successor of Father Marteau, who makes those excellent

pies which you remember. Boisjoli, let him send one of that make, but not like that which he made for La Ramée. Thank God! we have no further need of rope ladders, poniards, and choke-pears."

"Monseigneur," said Athos, "don't put your steward out for us. We know his numerous and varied talents. This evening, with your Highness's permission, we simply wish to have news of your welfare and to take your commands."

"Oh, as to my health, you see, Messieurs, it's excellent. A constitution able to resist five years in Vincennes under M. de Chavigny can bear anything. As to commands, I confess that I should find it very difficult to give you any, seeing that every one gives his own, and the end will be, if this goes on, that I shall give none at all."

"Really?" said Athos; "yet I thought that it was on your union that parliament counted."

"Ah, yes, our union; that's a fine thing! With the Duc de Bouillon it still continues, for he has the gout, and cannot leave his bed. There is a way of putting our heads together; but with M. d'Elbeuf and his elephants of sons — You know the triolet on the Duc d'Elbeuf, Messieurs?"

"No, Monseigneur."

"Truly."

The duke began to sing: —

"M. d'Elbeuf and his big sons
Are the rage at the Place Royale;
There they all four go prancing,
M. d'Elbeuf and his big sons.
But as soon as they beat to arms,
Adieu their martial humor.
M. d'Elbeuf and his big sons
Are the rage at the Place Royale."

"But," resumed Athos, "this, I hope, is not the case with the Coadjutor?"

"Ah, well, yes; with the Coadjutor it is still worse. God preserve you from mischief-making bishops, especially when they wear a cuirass under their priest's dress! Instead of keeping himself quiet in his see to chant Te Deums for victories which we do not gain, or for victories in which we are beaten, do you know what he does?"

"No."

"He raises a regiment to which he gives the name of the regiment of Corinth. He makes lieutenants and captains neither more nor less than a marshal does, and colonels like the king."

"Yes," said Aramis, "but when there is need of fighting, I hope he keeps in his archbishopric."

"Oh, no, not at all; there you are mistaken, my dear D'Herblay. When there is need of fighting, he fights; so that as the death of his uncle has given him a seat in parliament, he is now unceasingly on his legs, — in parliament, at the council, fighting. The Prince de Conti is general in appearance, and what an appearance! A hunchback prince! Ah, matters are in a bad state, Messieurs; everything is going wrong!"

"So that, Monseigneur, your Highness is discontented?" said Athos, exchanging looks with Aramis.

"Discontented, Count! Say rather my Highness is enraged. It comes to this, — mind, I tell *you* what I would not tell to others, — it comes to this, that if the queen, acknowledging her wrong-doings to me, should recall my exiled mother, and give me the reversion of the admiralty which belonged to Monsieur my father, and which was promised me at his death, well, I should not be far from training some dogs whom I would teach to say that there are in France greater thieves than M. de Mazarin."

It was not only a look, but a look and a smile that Athos and Aramis exchanged; had they not met them they might have guessed that MM. de Châtillon and de Flamarens had been there. So they did not breathe a word concerning Mazarin's presence in Paris.

"Monseigneur," said Athos, "we are quite satisfied. We had no other end in view, in coming so late to visit your Highness, than to prove our devotedness, and that we hold ourselves at your disposition as your most faithful servants."

"My most faithful friends, Messieurs, you have proved to be; and if ever I come to terms with the court, I will prove to you, I hope, that I continue your friend, as also that of your friends — what the devil are their names?"

"D'Artagnan and Porthos.

"Ah, yes! that is right. I am yours, wholly and always."

Athos and Aramis bowed, and took their leave.

"My dear Athos," said Aramis, "I think that you agreed to accompany me, just to give me a lesson."

"Wait, my friend," said Athos; "it will be time for you to say that when we leave the Coadjutor's."

And they took the road to the city. They found the streets inundated, and they had to take a boat. It was past eleven; but they knew that there was no fixed hour for visiting the Coadjutor, his incredible activity turning night into day and day into night.

The archiepiscopal palace rose out of the bosom of the water, and one might say from the number of boats moored on all sides around it that one was not in Paris but in Venice. These boats were going, coming, crossing one another in all directions, penetrating the labyrinth of streets in the city, or right away in the direction of the

arsenal or the Quai St. Victor, and then floating as on a lake. Some of these boats were silent and dark, others were lighted up and noisy. The two friends glided into the midst of this network of small craft, and landed in their turn.

All the ground-floor of the palace was inundated, but some sort of ladders had been placed against the walls, and all the change caused by the inundation was that in place of entering by the doors one entered by the windows.

Thus it was that Athos and Aramis landed in the prelate's ante-room. It was crowded, for a dozen lords were crammed into a waiting-room.

"Good gracious!" said Aramis, "just look, Athos! Is this coxcomb of a Coadjutor going to give himself the pleasure of making us wait here?"

Athos smiled.

"My dear friend," said he, "you must take people with all the inconveniences of their position; the Coadjutor is just now one of the seven or eight kings reigning in Paris, and has a court."

"Yes," said Aramis, "but *we* are not courtiers."

"So we are going to send in our names, and if on seeing them he does not give us a favorable reply, well! we will leave him to the affairs of France or to his own. All that needs to be done is to call a servant and put a half-pistole into his hand."

"Eh! precisely," exclaimed Aramis. "I am not mistaken — yes — no — yes, really, Bazin; come here, stupid!"

Bazin, who at that moment was crossing the anteroom, majestically dressed in his ecclesiastical uniform, turned round with a frown to see who the impertinent fellow was that was thus addressing him. But he no sooner recog-

nized Aramis than the tiger was changed into the lamb, and approaching the two gentlemen, "Why!" said he, "it is you, Monsieur the Chevalier and Monsieur the Count! You appear just at the time when we were so anxious about you. Oh, how pleased I am to see you again!"

"Much obliged, M. Bazin," said Aramis; "a truce to compliments. We are come to see Monsieur the Coadjutor, but are in a hurry, and want to see him at once."

"Certainly!" said Bazin, "this very instant, doubtless; it is not for gentlemen of your consideration to be kept waiting. Only just now he is in secret conference with a M. de Bruy."

"Bruy!" exclaimed Athos and Aramis, together.

"Yes; it was I who announced him, so I am sure that that was the name. Do you know him, Monsieur?" added Bazin, turning towards Aramis.

"I believe I do."

"I cannot say as much, for he was so closely enveloped in his cloak that however I might have tried, I could not see the smallest part of his face. But I will go and announce you, and this time I may be more fortunate."

"Useless," said Aramis; "we had better give up trying to see the Coadjutor this evening, had we not, Athos?"

"As you please," said the count.

"Yes, he has most important matters to discuss with this M. de Bruy."

"And shall I announce to him that you gentlemen came to the palace?"

"No; it is not worth the trouble," said Aramis. "Come, Athos."

And the two friends, pushing through the crowd of men-servants, left the parlor, followed by Bazin, who

bore witness to their importance by the profusion of his salutations.

"Well!" asked Athos, when they were in the boat, "do you begin to believe, my friend, that we should have played a bad game for all these people by the arrest of M. de Mazarin?"

"You are wisdom incarnate, Athos!"

What had above all struck the two friends was the little importance which the court of France attached to the terrible events that had occurred in England, and which, it seemed to them, ought to occupy the attention of all Europe. In fact, apart from a poor widow and a royal orphan who were weeping in a corner of the Louvre, no one appeared to know that there had existed a King Charles I., and that this king had just died on a scaffold.

The two friends had arranged to meet again the next morning at ten, for although the night was far advanced when they reached the door of the hôtel, Aramis had pretended that he had still to make some visits of importance, and had allowed Athos to enter alone.

At ten the next day they again met. Athos had been out since six.

"Well! have you had any news?" asked Athos.

"None. I have seen nothing either of D'Artagnan or of Porthos. Have you?"

"Nothing! and really," said Athos, "this delay is inexplicable; they took the shortest route, and ought consequently to have arrived before us."

"Add to that," said Aramis, "we know how rapid D'Artagnan is in his movements, and he is not a man to lose an hour, knowing that we are expecting him —"

"He counted, if you remember, on being here on the fifth day."

"And now we are at the ninth. It is this evening that the delay expires."

"What do you think of doing," Athos asked, "if we have no news by this evening?"

"Why, beginning a search."

"Very well."

"But Raoul?" asked Aramis.

A slight shade passed across the count's face.

"Raoul gives me some uneasiness. He received yesterday a message from the Prince de Condé, and went to join him at St. Cloud, and has not come back."

"Have you been to see Madame de Chevreuse?"

"She was not at home. I think, Aramis, you ought to call on Madame de Longueville."

"I have done so. She was not at home either; but at least she had left the address of her new abode."

"Where was she?"

"Guess. I give you a thousand times to guess it in."

"How can I guess where she was at midnight?—for I suppose you went to her on leaving me. How can I guess where the most beautiful and active of all the lady Frondeurs is?"

"At the Hôtel de Ville, my dear fellow."

"What, at the Hôtel de Ville! Is she then nominated provost of the shopkeepers?"

"No; but she has been made provisional queen of Paris, and as she did not dare to take up her residence at first at the Palais-Royal or the Tuileries, she has been installed at the Hôtel de Ville, where she is on the point of giving an heir or heiress to that dear duke."

"You had not informed me of this circumstance, Aramis," said Athos.

"Bah, truly! It was a thing forgotten, then; excuse me."

"Well," asked Athos, "what are we going to do from now till this evening? It seems to me that we are wasting time."

"You forget, my friend, that we have some work cut out for us."

"Where is it?"

"In the direction of Charenton, of course. I have the hope of meeting there, according to his promise, a certain M. de Châtillon, whom for a long time I have hated."

"And why so?"

"Because he is the brother of a certain M. de Coligny."

"Ah! that 's true, I was forgetting — who claimed the honor of being your rival. He was cruelly punished for his audacity, my dear friend; and in truth that ought to satisfy you."

"Yes; but what could I do? That does not at all satisfy me. I am a rancorous fellow. It is the only point by which I hold to the Church. You understand, Athos, you are by no means obliged to follow me."

"Come now," said Athos, "you are joking."

"In that case, my dear friend, if you have decided to accompany me, there is no time to lose. The drums have beaten; I have met the cannon, which are setting off. I have seen the citizens who are drawn up in line on the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville; they are certainly going to fight in the direction of Charenton, as the Duc de Châtillon told me yesterday."

"I should have thought," said Athos, "that last night's conferences would have somewhat modified these warlike determinations."

"Yes, doubtless; but they will fight none the less, were it only to mask these conferences the better."

"Poor fellows!" said Athos, "who are going to let themselves be killed in order that Sedan may be handed

over to M. de Bouillon, the reversion of the admiralty given to M. de Beaufort, and that the Coadjutor may become cardinal!"

"Come, come, my dear fellow," said Aramis, "acknowledge that you would not be so philosophical if your Raoul were not mixed up in the brawl."

"Perhaps you speak truly."

"Well! let us go where the fighting is; it 's a sure way of finding D'Artagnan, Porthos, and perhaps even Raoul."

"Alas!" said Athos.

"My good friend," said Aramis, "now that we are at Paris, you must, believe me, lose that habit of sighing constantly. In war time, one must do as they do in war time, Athos! Are you no longer a man of the sword, and have you become a churchman? Look! there are some fine-looking citizens going by; it is interesting, indeed! And see that captain! he has almost a military air!"

"They are coming out of the Rue du Mouton."

"Drums leading, like true soldiers! But do you see that gay fellow? How he swings, how he bends his back!"

"*Heu!*" said Grimaud.

"What?" asked Athos.

"Planchet, Monsieur."

"Lieutenant yesterday," said Aramis, "captain to-day, colonel, doubtless, to-morrow; in a week the gay fellow will be Marshal of France."

"Let us ask him for information," said Athos.

And the two friends drew near Planchet, who, prouder than ever to be seen in command, condescended to explain to the two gentlemen that he had orders to take position on the Place Royale with two hundred men, forming the rear-guard of the Parisian army, and to move from there towards Charenton when there should be need.

As Athos and Aramis were going in the same direction, they escorted Planchet to his assigned position.

Planchet quite skilfully manœuvred his men on the Place Royale and placed them in *échelons* behind a long file of citizens placed in the Rue and Faubourg St. Antoine, awaiting the signal for the combat.

"The day will be hot," said Planchet, in a warlike tone.

"Yes, doubtless," replied Aramis; "but it is a long way from here to the enemy."

"Monsieur, we shall decrease the distance," replied a citizen.

Aramis saluted, then turning towards Athos, "I do not care to camp in the Place Royale with all these people," said he; "are you willing to go forward? We shall see things better."

"And then M. de Châtillon will not come to find you in the Place Royale, is not that so? Come then, forward, my friend!"

"Shall you not have two words to say on your part to M. de Flamarens?"

"Friend," said Athos, "I have formed the resolution no more to draw the sword unless absolutely compelled."

"Since when was that?"

"Since I drew the poniard."

"Ah, good! another souvenir of M. Mordaunt; well, my dear fellow, it only remains for you to experience remorse for having killed that fellow!"

"*Chut!*" said Athos, putting his finger to his lips with a sad smile; "don't let us talk any more of Mordaunt, — it would bring us misfortune."

And Athos pushed on towards Charenton, going along the faubourg, then the Vallée de Fécamp, now quite dark with armed citizens. It needs hardly be said that Aramis followed him at half his horse's length.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE COMBAT AT CHARENTON.

As Athos and Aramis rode on, they passed the different corps drawn up on the route, they saw polished bright cuirasses follow rusty arms, and glittering muskets follow all kinds of halberds.

"I think that here will be the real battlefield," said Aramis. "Do you see this corps of cavalry stationed before the bridge, pistol in hand? Hey! take care, here is some artillery coming!"

"Ah! come, my dear fellow, where have you led us? It seems to me that I see all around us officers of the royal army. Is not that M. de Châtillon himself coming on with his two brigadiers?"

And Athos took his sword, while Aramis, believing that he had really passed the boundaries of the Parisian camp, put his hand to his pistols.

"Good-day, Messieurs," said the duke; "I see you do not understand what is going on, but a word or two will explain it all to you. We are for a while keeping a truce; there is a conference going on. Monsieur the Prince, M. de Retz, M. de Beaufort, and M. de Bouillon are talking together on political matters. Now, one of two things will happen: either matters will not be arranged, and we shall meet, Chevalier; or they will be arranged, and, as I shall be free from my command, we shall meet still."

"Monsieur," said Aramis, "you talk wonderfully well

Permit me to put you one question. Where are the plenipotentiaries?"

"In Charenton itself; in the second house to the right as you enter from Paris."

"And this conference was not foreseen?"

"No, Messieurs. It is the result, as it appears, of the fresh proposals which M. de Mazarin caused to be made yesterday evening to the Parisians."

Athos and Aramis looked at each other, laughing; they knew better than any one what the proposals were, to whom made, and who made them.

"And this house where the parties are," asked Athos, "belongs —"

"To M. de Chanleu, who commands your troops at Charenton. I say *your* troops, because I presume these gentlemen are Frondeurs."

"Well, — almost," said Aramis.

"How do you mean — almost?"

"Monsieur, you know better than any one that at present one can hardly say very precisely what one is."

"We are for the king and Messieurs the Princes," said Athos.

"It is difficult to understand you," said Châtillon; "the king is with us, and he has for his commanders-in-chief, M. d'Orléans and M. de Condé."

"Yes," said Athos; "but his place is in our ranks with MM. de Conti, de Beaufort, d'Elbeuf, and de Bouillon."

"That may be," said Châtillon. "As for myself, I have little sympathy for M. de Mazarin; my interests indeed are in Paris. I have there an important law-suit on which my whole fortune depends, and only just now have I consulted my lawyer —"

"In Paris?"

"No; at Charenton, — M. Viole, whom you know by

name, an excellent man, a little obstinate; but he is not in parliament for nothing. I was intending to see him last evening, but our meeting prevented me from occupying myself with my business. Now, as it is necessary that business should be done, I have profited by the truce; and that is how I find myself in the midst of you."

"M. Viole gives then consultations in the open air?" asked Aramis, laughing.

"Yes, Monsieur, and on horseback even. He commands to-day five hundred soldiers armed with pistols, and I have made him a visit accompanied, to do him honor, by these two little pieces of cannon, at the head of which you were so astonished to see me. I did not recognize him at first, I must confess; he has a long sword over his robe, and pistols at his waist, which gives him a formidable air, with which you will be amused, if you have the good fortune to meet him."

"If he is such a curiosity, one might give one's self the trouble to look expressly for him," said Aramis.

"You must make haste, Monsieur, for the conference cannot last much longer."

"If the conference breaks up without leading to any result," said Athos, "you will try to take Charenton?"

"Those are my orders; I command the attacking troops, and I shall do my best to succeed."

"Monsieur," said Athos, "since you command the cavalry —"

"I beg pardon, I command in chief."

"Better still. You ought to know all your officers — I mean of course the higher grades."

"Well, yes; nearly all."

"Be so good as to tell me then, if you have under your orders, M. le Chevalier D'Artagnan, lieutenant in the Musketeers?"

"No, Monsieur, he is not with us; for more than six weeks he has been away from Paris on a mission, they say, to England."

"I know that, but I thought he had returned."

"No, Monsieur, and I don't think any one has seen him. I am the better able to answer you because the musketeers belong to our troops, and it is M. de Cambon who meanwhile holds M. d'Artagnan's post."

The two friends looked at each other.

"You see," said Athos.

"It is strange," said Aramis.

"Some misfortune must undoubtedly have happened to them on the road."

"This is now the eighth day, and this evening the delay fixed on expires. If we have no news this evening, we will set out to-morrow morning."

Athos signified his assent. Then turning round, "And M. de Bragelonne, a young man of fifteen, an attaché of Monsieur the Prince?" asked Athos, somewhat embarrassed in letting the sceptical Aramis see his paternal solicitude; "is he known to you, Monsieur the Duke?"

"Yes, certainly," replied Châtillon. "He came this morning with Monsieur the Prince. A charming young man! Is he one of your friends, Monsieur the Count?"

"Yes, Monsieur," replied Athos, somewhat agitated; "and I greatly desire to see him. Is this practicable?"

"Quite so, Monsieur. Please to go with me, and I will take you to headquarters."

"Holloa!" said Aramis, turning round; "there is plenty of noise behind us, it seems to me."

"It is in fact a number of cavaliers coming to us," said Châtillon.

"I recognize Monsieur the Coadjutor in his hat of the Fronde style."

"And I M. de Beaufort with his white feathers."

"They are coming on at a gallop. Monsieur the Prince is along with them. Ah! see, he has left them."

"They are beating the rappel!" exclaimed Châtillon. "Do you hear? We must inform ourselves."

In fact, they saw the soldiers running to arms; the cavaliers on foot re-mounted, the trumpets were sounding, drums beating. M. de Beaufort drew his sword.

In his turn Monsieur the Prince gave a sign of recall, and all the officers of the royal army, for the moment intermingled with the Parisian troops, hastened back to him.

"Messieurs," said Châtillon, "the truce is broken, that's evident; they are going to fight. Return then into Charenton, for I shall begin the attack presently. There is the signal that Monsieur the Prince gives me."

In fact, a cornet elevated three times Monsieur the Prince's colors.

"*Au revoir*, Monsieur the Chevalier!" cried Châtillon; and he set off at a gallop to rejoin his escort.

Athos and Aramis turned their horses' heads, and saluted the Coadjutor and M. de Beaufort. As for M. de Bouillon, he had had, towards the end of the conference, such a terrible attack of gout that he had to be sent back to Paris in a litter. In exchange, M. le Duc d'Elbeuf, surrounded by his four sons as by a staff, passed through the ranks of the Parisian army. Meanwhile, between Charenton and the royal army, a large blank space was left, which seemed meant for the last resting-place of the dead.

"This Mazarin is veritably a disgrace to France!" said the Coadjutor, tightening his sword-belt, which he wore, like the old military prelates, over his archiepiscopal robe. "He is a stingy fellow, who would like to govern France as he would a small farm. France can never expect peace and happiness until he has left it."

"It would seem that there has been no agreement about the color of his hat," said Aramis.

At the same moment M. de Beaufort raised his sword.

"Messieurs," said he, "our negotiations have proved useless. We were desirous of getting rid of this coward Mazarin, but the queen, who is infatuated with him, absolutely intends to keep him as minister; so that only one resource remains, — that is, of fighting congruously."

"Good!" said the Coadjutor; "spoken with the usual eloquence of M. de Beaufort."

"Fortunately," said Aramis, "he corrects his faults in French with the point of his sword."

"Pooh!" said the Coadjutor, with contempt; "I swear that in all this war he has been very pale."

He then also drew his sword.

"Messieurs," said he, "there is the enemy drawing near; we shall well be able, I hope, to spare him half the road."

And without troubling himself whether he was followed or not, he set off. His regiment, which bore the name of the Corinthian regiment, from the name of his archbishopric, fell into confusion behind him, and began the *mêlée.*

M. de Beaufort sent forth his cavalry, under the command of M. de Noirmoutiers, towards Étampes, where they expected to meet a convoy of provisions impatiently expected by the Parisians. M. de Beaufort was preparing to support it.

M. de Chanleu, who commanded the place, kept himself with the best of his troops, ready to resist an assault, and even, should the enemy be repulsed, to attempt a *sortie.*

At the end of half an hour the fighting became general. The Coadjutor, whom the reputation of M. de Beaufort's

courage exasperated, threw himself into the front, and did marvellous feats of courage. His real vocation was the sword, and he was happy whenever he could draw it, no matter for whom or for what. But if he understood his vocation as a soldier, he badly performed that of colonel. With seven or eight hundred men he went against three thousand, who marched in one mass and beat the Coadjutor's soldiers, who reached the ramparts in disorder. But Chanleu's artillery fire stopped the royal troops, which for a moment seemed in disorder. But that lasted only a little time, and they retired behind some houses and a little wood, to re-form.

Chanleu thought the moment arrived; he dashed off at the head of two regiments to pursue the king's troops; but, as we have said, they re-formed and returned to the charge, led by M. de Châtillon in person. The charge was so bold and so skilfully executed that Chanleu and his men found themselves almost surrounded. He ordered a retreat, which was conducted foot by foot, and step by step. Unfortunately, a moment after, Chanleu fell mortally wounded.

M. de Châtillon saw him fall, and announced it aloud, which redoubled the courage of the royal troops, and completely demoralized the two regiments with which Chanleu had made the *sortie*. They fled to the entrenchments, at the foot of which the Coadjutor was trying to re-form his defeated regiment.

Suddenly a squadron of cavalry came to an encounter with the conquerors, who were entering pell-mell with the fugitives into the entrenchments. Athos and Aramis charged at their head, Aramis sword and pistol in hand, Athos sword in scabbard and pistol in holster. Athos was as calm as if on parade, only his face looked sad at seeing so many men cutting one another's throats,

and being sacrificed to royal obstinacy and princely rancor. Aramis, on the contrary, was slaying, and growing by degrees more infuriated, as was his habit. His quick eye became burning; his mouth, so finely shaped, smiled a mournful smile; his open nostrils seemed to breathe bloodshed; each of his sword-strokes told, and the butt-end of his pistol finished the wounded who attempted to rise.

On the opposing side, two cavaliers, one covered with a gilt cuirass, the other with one of buff, from which proceeded the sleeves of a close coat of blue velvet, were charging in the front rank. The cavalier in the gilt cuirass came to attack Aramis, and gave him a sword-blow, which Aramis parried with his usual dexterity.

"Ah, it is you, M. de Châtillon!" exclaimed the chevalier; "I have been awaiting you."

"I hope I have not kept you waiting too long, Monsieur," said the duke; "at any rate, here I am."

"M. de Châtillon," said Aramis, drawing a second pistol, which he had reserved for this occasion, "I think that if your pistol is unloaded you are a dead man."

"God be thanked, it is not."

And the duke, taking aim at Aramis, fired. But Aramis bent his head just when he saw the duke's finger on the trigger, and the ball passed over him.

"Oh! you have missed me," said Aramis. "But I am not going to miss you, I swear."

"If I give you the time!" exclaimed Châtillon, spurring his horse and dashing at him with his sword upraised.

Aramis awaited him with that terrible smile, peculiar to him at such a moment; and Athos, who saw M. de Châtillon advancing like lightning on Aramis, was about calling out, "Fire!" when he fired. M. de Châtillon opened

his arms and fell back on his horse. The ball had entered his chest by the notch of the cuirass.

"I am dead!" murmured the duke; and he slipped off his horse to the ground.

"I told you so, Monsieur, and I am sorry now at having kept my word. Can I be of any service to you?"

Châtillon made a movement with his hand; and Aramis was preparing to dismount, when he suddenly received a violent blow in the side. It was from a sword, but the cuirass parried it. He turned round sharply, seized his new antagonist by the wrist, when two exclamations arose at the same time, one from him, the other from Athos:

"Raoul!"

The young man recognized both the face of Chevalier d'Herblay and the voice of his father, and let his sword drop. Several cavaliers of the Parisian army dashed upon Raoul, but Aramis covered him with his sword.

"My prisoner! Keep off!" he cried.

Athos, meanwhile, took his son's horse by the bridle, and led it out of the *mêlée*.

At that moment, Monsieur the Prince, who was supporting M. de Châtillon in the second line, appeared in the midst of the *mêlée*; he was recognized by the blows he dealt, and by the flash of his eagle eye.

At the sight of him, the regiment of the archbishop of Corinth, whom the Coadjutor in spite of all his efforts could not re-organize, threw itself into the midst of the Parisian troops, and disordered everything while fleeing into Charenton, which it passed through without stopping. The Coadjutor, carried along by it, passed by the group, composed of Athos, Aramis, and Raoul.

"Ah, ah!" said Aramis, who could not help, from jealousy, rejoicing at the check received by the Coadjutor,

"from your position of archbishop you ought to know the Scriptures."

"And what have the Scriptures in common with what has happened to me?" asked the Coadjutor.

"Why, Monsieur the Prince is treating you to-day as Saint Paul did the first of the Corinthians."

"Come, come!" said Athos, "the joke is not bad, but we must not waste time in compliments here. Forward, or rather rearwards, for it looks as though the combat had been lost by the Frondeurs."

"That 's all the same to me!" said Aramis; "I came only to meet M. de Châtillon. I have done so, and am satisfied; a duel with a Châtillon, — that 's flattering!"

"And a prisoner besides," said Athos, pointing to Raoul.

The three cavaliers went forward at a gallop. The young man had felt a thrill of joy at finding his father. They galloped side by side, the young man's left hand in Athos's right. When they were a good way off the battle-field, "What were you doing so far forward in the *mêlée*, my friend?" Athos asked Raoul; "that was not at all your place, it seems to me, as you are not well armed."

"In fact I have no business to be fighting at all to-day, Monsieur; I was sent to the cardinal, and was setting out for Rueil, when seeing M. de Châtillon charge, I felt a desire to charge along with him. Then he told me that two cavaliers of the Parisian army were inquiring for me, and he mentioned the Comte de la Fère."

"What! you knew we were here, and yet wished to kill your friend, the Chevalier?"

"I did not recognize Monsieur the Chevalier in his armor," said Raoul, blushing, "but I ought to have done so by his coolness and skill."

"Thanks for the compliment, my young friend," said Aramis; "one can easily see who has given you lessons in politeness. But you were going to Rueil, you say?"

"Yes."

"To the cardinal's?"

"I think so. I have a despatch from Monsieur the Prince for his Eminence."

"You must take it to him."

"Oh! as to that, one moment, — no false generosity, Count. Why, our fate, and what is of far greater importance, the fate of our friends is perhaps in that despatch."

"But there is no need that this young man should fail in his duty," said Athos.

"First of all, Count, this young man is a prisoner; you forget that. What we are doing is by the rules of war. Besides, the vanquished ought not to be too particular as to choice of means. Give me that despatch, Raoul."

Raoul hesitated, looking at Athos as if for direction.

"Give up the despatch, Raoul," said Athos, "you are Chevalier d'Herblay's prisoner."

Raoul yielded with reluctance, but Aramis, less scrupulous than the count, seized the despatch eagerly, perused it, and giving it to Athos: "You," said he, "who are a believer, read and see in that letter, after reflection, something that Providence judges important for us to know."

Athos took the letter with a frown, but the thought that in it was something concerning D'Artagnan helped him to overcome the disgust he felt in reading it.

This is what the letter contained: —

MONSEIGNEUR, — I shall this evening send to your Eminence to strengthen M. de Comminges's troop, the ten men for whom you ask. They are good soldiers, suitable for keeping

in hand the two fierce adversaries whose skill and resolution your Eminence fears.

"Oh, oh!" said Athos.

"Well!" asked Aramis, "what do you think of that? For the safe keeping of two adversaries there are needed, besides Comminges's troop, ten good soldiers. Is n't this description as like D'Artagnan and Porthos as two peas are to each other?"

"We will beat up Paris all day, and if we have no news this evening we will take the route to Picardy; and I answer for it, from D'Artagnan's fertile imagination, that we shall not be long in finding some indication tending to remove our doubts."

"Let us then beat up Paris, and especially make inquiries of Planchet whether he has heard anything of his old master."

"Poor Planchet! you speak of him quite coolly, Aramis; he is massacred without doubt. All the warlike citizens will have gone forth and a massacre taken place."

As this was quite probable, the two friends entered Paris by the Porte du Temple with some feeling of disquietude, and they went towards the Place Royale, where they expected to hear news of these poor citizens. But how great was the astonishment of the two friends to find them drinking and bantering one another; they and their captain still stationed in the Place Royale, and bewailed doubtless by their families, who heard the cannon firing at Charenton and thought them exposed to it.

Athos and Aramis again inquired of Planchet, but he had heard nothing of D'Artagnan. They wished to take him with them, but he declared he could not leave without orders from his superiors.

At five o'clock only, they returned to their homes, say-

ing that they returned from the battle ; they had not lost sight of the bronze horse of Louis XIII.

" Thousand thunders ! " said Planchet, on re-entering his shop in the Rue des Lombards, " we have been beaten soundly. I shall never console myself."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

JOURNEY TO PICARDY.

Athos and Aramis, while quite safe in Paris, did not hide from themselves the fact that directly they put foot outside of it, they would run great risks; but with such men that was not an important question. Besides, they felt that the issue of this second Odyssey was drawing near, and that a new effort was all that was needed.

In addition to which Paris itself was by no means peaceful; food was falling short, and as each of M. le Prince de Conti's generals felt it needful to regain his influence, a small riot took place which he put down, and which gave him a momentary superiority over his colleagues.

In one of these riots, M. de Beaufort had caused to be pillaged the house and library of M. de Mazarin, to give, he said, something to the poor people to gnaw.

Athos and Aramis left Paris upon this *coup d'état* which had taken place on the evening of the same day on which the Parisians were beaten at Charenton.

The two left Paris in misery, almost arrived at the point of famine, agitated by fear, and torn by factions. Parisians and Frondeurs, they expected to find the same misery, the same fears, the same intrigues in the enemy's camp. Their surprise then was great when, in passing to St. Denis, they learned that at St. Germain they were laughing, singing, and leading a gay life.

The two gentlemen took out-of-the-way roads first, so as not to fall into the hands of Mazarin's partisans scattered

about the Ile-de-France; also to escape the Frondeurs, who held Normandy, and who would certainly have taken them to M. de Longueville, for the latter to recognize them either as friends or enemies. When once these dangers were escaped, they got on to the road from Boulogne to Abbeville, and followed it step by step, trace by trace.

Yet for some time they were in doubt. Two or three inns had been visited, and the innkeepers questioned without a single indication arising to clear up their doubts and guide their search, when at Montreuil Athos felt something on the table rough to the touch of his delicate fingers. He raised up the cloth and read on the wood these hieroglyphics deeply cut with the blade of a knife: "Port — d'Artag — 2 Feb."

"Famous," said Athos, showing the inscription to Aramis; "we thought of sleeping here, but it is useless. Let us go on further."

They re-mounted and reached Abbeville. There they were greatly perplexed on account of the large number of inns. They could not visit them all. How could they guess in which their friends had stayed?

"Believe me, Athos, don't dream of finding out anything at Abbeville. If we are in difficulty, so also were our friends. If it were only Porthos, he would have put up at the finest hotel, and knowing this we should be sure to find traces of his passing through here. But D'Artagnan has none of those weaknesses. Porthos would in vain have observed that he was dying of hunger; the former would have gone on, inexorable as fate."

They therefore continued their route, but nothing presented itself. This was one of the most distressing and wearisome tasks that Athos and Aramis had ever undertaken; and without the triple motive of honor, friendship, and gratitude in their soul, our two travellers would have

a hundred times, given up searching the soil, questioning passers-by, noticing signs, and scanning countenances.

Thus they came to Peronné. Athos began to despair. His noble, anxious disposition reproached itself for this ignorance in which Aramis and he were. Doubtless he had searched carelessly; they had not been persistent enough in their questionings, nor shown perspicacity in their investigations. They were about re-tracing their steps, when in crossing the faubourg which led to the town-gates, on a blank wall forming the angle of a street turning round by the rampart, Athos cast his eyes on a design in black pencil, which represented with the simplicity of a child's first artistic attempts two cavaliers galloping at a mad rate, one of them holding a placard in his hand on which were written in Spanish the words: "We are being pursued."

"Oh, oh!" said Athos, "now all is clear as the day. Pursued as they were, D'Artagnan stopped here five minutes; that proves at any rate that his pursuers were not close; perhaps he may have succeeded in escaping."

Aramis shook his head.

"If he had escaped we should have seen him again, or at least should have heard of him."

"You are right, Aramis, let us go on."

To speak of the distress and impatience of the two friends would be impossible. Athos's tender, loving heart felt the distress; impatience troubled Aramis's nervous mind, so easily disturbed. Thus they both galloped for three or four hours with the frenzy of the two cavaliers of the wall. Suddenly in a narrow gorge, shut in by two declivities, they saw the route half-barred by an enormous stone. Its former position was indicated on one of the sides of the declivity by a sort of cavity which had been left there by its removal, proving that it had not rolled

down of itself, while its weight showed that to move it the arms of Enceladus or Briareus were needed.

Aramis stopped.

"Oh!" said he, looking at the stone, "there is in that something of Ajax, of Telamon, or of Porthos. Let us get down, Count, and examine this rock."

The stone had been placed there with the plain purpose of barring the road against some horseman. It had therefore been placed across at first; but the horsemen had found the obstacle and had removed it.

The two friends examined the stone on the exposed sides, but saw nothing particular. They then called Blaisois and Grimaud. The four together succeeded in turning over the stone. On the side which had touched the earth was written: —

"Eight light horse are pursuing us. If we reach Compiègne we shall stop at the Crowned Peacock; the host is a friend of ours."

"At last here is something definite," said Athos, "and in any case we shall know what to be at. Let us go on then to the Crowned Peacock."

"Yes," said Aramis; "but if we mean to get there we must give our horses some rest; they are almost knocked up."

Aramis spoke the truth. They stopped at the first public-house; they gave each horse a double feed, mixed in some wine, and after a rest of three hours they started again. The men themselves were worn out by fatigue, but hope sustained them.

Six hours later they reached Compiègne, and made inquiries for the Crowned Peacock. They were shown a sign representing the god Pan with a crown on his head. The two friends dismounted without examining the meaning of the sign, which Aramis at any other time would

have criticised. They found the landlord an honest fellow, bald and potbellied like a grotesque China figure. When they asked if he had not lodged some time back two gentlemen pursued by some light horsemen, the host without saying a word went to a chest and brought back the half of a rapier-blade.

"Do you know that?" he said.

Athos gave but a mere look at it.

"That 's part of D'Artagnan's sword," said he.

"The large or the small one?" asked the host.

"The small one," replied Athos.

"I see you are the friends of those gentlemen."

"Well! what has happened to them?"

"They entered the courtyard with their horses exhausted, and before there was time to close the big gates, eight light horse who were after them entered too."

"Eight!" said Aramis. "I am astonished that D'Artagnan and Porthos, two such intrepid men, let themselves be arrested by eight men."

"Without doubt, Monsieur; and the eight men would not have succeeded had they not been reinforced out of the town by twenty soldiers of the Royal Italian regiment in garrison here, so that your two friends were literally overwhelmed by numbers."

"Arrested!" said Athos; "do you know why?"

"No, Monsieur; they were carried off at once, and had not time to tell me anything. Only when they had gone, I found this fragment of a sword while helping to pick up two dead men and five or six wounded."

"And did nothing happen to them?" asked Aramis.

"No, Monsieur, I believe not."

"Come," said Aramis, "that 's a consolation."

"And do you know where they are taken?"

"Towards Louvres."

"Let us leave Blaisois and Grimaud here," said Athos; "they can return to-morrow to Paris with the horses, and let us travel post."

"Let us travel post," said Aramis.

They sent to seek for horses. Meanwhile the friends took a hasty dinner; they wanted, if they gained any information at Louvres, to be able to continue their journey.

They reached Louvres. There was only one inn. They there drank a liquor, which has kept its reputation to our own days, and which was manufactured already at that time.

"Let us dismount here," said Athos; "D'Artagnan will not have failed on this occasion to leave us some indication."

They entered and asked for two glasses at the counter, as D'Artagnan and Porthos had no doubt done. The drinking-counter was covered with pewter. On this had been scratched with the point of a large pin, "Rueil, D."

"They are at Rueil!" said Aramis, who first caught sight of the inscription.

"Let us go then to Rueil," said Athos.

"That means to throw ourselves into the wolf's throat," said Aramis.

"If I had been Jonah's friend to the extent I am D'Artagnan's, I would have followed him into the whale's belly, and you would do as much as I, Aramis."

"My dear Count, I really believe that you make me better than I am. If I were alone, I don't know whether I should thus go to Rueil without great precautions; but where you go, I will go."

They took horse and set off for Rueil.

Athos, without being aware of it, had given Aramis the best advice possible. The deputies of parliament had just

come to Rueil to take part in those famous conferences which would last three weeks, and lead to that lame peace at the end of which Monsieur the Prince was arrested. Rueil was crowded, on the part of parliament, with barristers, chief justices, councillors, lawyers of every sort; and on the part of the court with gentlemen, officers, and guards; it was therefore easy to remain as unknown as one desired to be. Besides, the conferences had led to a truce, and to arrest two gentlemen at that moment, even were they leading Frondeurs, was to violate the law of nations.

The two friends believed everybody to be filled with the thought that tormented them. They mixed with the various groups, thinking they would hear something said respecting D'Artagnan and Porthos; but every one was occupied only with articles and amendments. Athos inclined to the opinion that they ought to go straight to the minister.

"My friend," objected Aramis, "what you say on that point is all very well, but take care; our security arises from our obscurity. If we get known, one way or another, we shall go immediately to join our friends at the bottom of some low dungeon, whence the devil will not draw us out. Let us try not to find them by accident, but at our own choice. Arrested at Compiègne, they have been taken to Rueil, as we learned of a certainty at Louvres; at Rueil they have been questioned by the cardinal, who then has either kept them in guard near himself or sent them to St. Germain. As for the Bastille, they are not there, since it is in the hands of the Frondeurs, and Broussel's son commands there. They are not dead, for D'Artagnan's death would be notorious. As for Porthos, I believe him eternal as the Deity, though he may be less patient. Don't let us despair, let us stay

here, for my conviction is that they are here. But what is the matter? — you look quite pale!"

"I have," said Athos in a half-trembling voice, "recollected that at the château of Rueil, M. de Richelieu had made a frightful *oubliette* —"

"Oh! don't be alarmed," said Aramis. "M. de Richelieu was a gentleman, our equal in all respects by birth, our superior by position. He was able, like a king, to touch the grandest of us on the head, and make our heads, when he did so, shake on our shoulders. But M. de Mazarin is a pedant who can at the most take us by the collar like a policeman. Be re-assured, then, my friend; I persist in saying that D'Artagnan and Porthos are at Rueil, not only living, but living comfortably."

"No matter," said Athos, "we must obtain from the Coadjutor the right to belong to the conference, and in that way we might enter Rueil."

"With all those frightful limbs of the law! Do you believe that the liberty or imprisonment of D'Artagnan and Porthos will be in the least degree discussed? No; my opinion is, we must seek some other means."

"Well!" replied Athos, "I return to my first idea. I know no better means than acting frankly and loyally. I shall go, not to Mazarin, but to the queen, and say to her: 'Madame, restore our two servants and friends.'"

Aramis shook his head.

"It is the last resource, which you will always be free to use, Athos; but, believe me, use it only then; there will always be time to do that. Meanwhile let us go on with our search."

They continued therefore their search, gathering much information, and making many persons talk under a thousand pretexts, the one more ingenious than the other; finally they found a light horseman who acknowledged

that he was one of the escort who had brought D'Artagnan and Porthos from Compiègne to Rueil. Without the light horseman it would not have been known that they had entered the latter town.

Athos kept continually returning to the idea of seeing the queen.

"To see the queen," said Aramis, "you must first see the cardinal; and we shall have scarcely seen the cardinal — remember what I am telling you, Athos — before we shall be re-united to our friends, but not in the way you understand it. Now, this fashion of being re-united is very little pleasing to me. Let us act at liberty in order to act well and speedily."

"I shall see the queen."

"Well, my friend, if you are determined to do this foolish act, tell me, I pray you, a day in advance."

"Why so?"

"Because I shall profit from that circumstance to make a visit to Paris."

"To whom?"

"Hang it! how do I know? — perhaps to Madame de Longueville. She is all powerful there; she will help me. Only let me know by some one if you are arrested; then I will do my best to return."

"Why not risk the chance of being arrested with me, Aramis?"

"No, thank you."

"All four arrested and re-united, I believe we should not risk anything further. At the end of twenty-four hours we should be all four at liberty."

"My dear fellow, since I have killed Châtillon, who was the object of adoration by the ladies of St. Germain, I have too much glory around my head not to fear prison doubly. The queen might be ready to follow Mazarin's

counsels on this occasion, and Mazarin would advise my trial."

"But do you think, then, Aramis, that she loves this Italian as much as they say?"

"She once loved an Englishman, dearly."

"Ah, my friend, she is a woman!"

"No, you are mistaken, Athos; she is a queen."

"My dear friend, I am determined on my course; and shall go to seek an audience with Anne of Austria."

"Adieu, then, Athos, I am going to raise an army."

"What to do?"

"To come and besiege Rueil."

"Where shall we meet again?"

"At the foot of the cardinal's gallows."

And the two friends separated, Aramis to return to Paris, Athos by some preparatory steps to open up a way to the queen.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE GRATITUDE OF ANNE OF AUSTRIA.

Athos found much less difficulty than he expected in getting admittance to Anne of Austria's presence. At the first step all was, on the contrary, made smooth, and the audience he desired was granted for the next day at the end of the *levée*, at which his rank gave him the right to be present. A great crowd filled the apartments of St. Germain. Never at the Louvre or the Palais-Royal had Anne of Austria had a greater number of courtiers; only it was a movement appertaining to the second rank of the nobility; while all the first gentlemen of France were with M. de Conti, M. de Beaufort, and the Coadjutor.

Great gayety besides prevailed at this court. The particular feature of this war was that there were more couplets made than cannon fired. The court made ballads about the Parisians, who did the same respecting the court; and the wounds, although not mortal, were not less grievous, inflicted as they were by the arm of ridicule.

But in the midst of this general hilarity, and this apparent want of result, one great preoccupation lay hid in the depths of all minds. Would Mazarin continue minister or favorite, or would he who had come from the South like a cloud, be carried away by the wind which had wafted him hither? Every one hoped this, and desired it, so that the minister felt that all the homage and courtier-like respect around him only covered up a depth of

hate, ill disguised by fear and interest. He felt ill at ease, not knowing on what to reckon nor on whom to rely.

Monsieur the Prince himself, who was fighting for him, never missed an occasion of bantering or humiliating him; and two or three times, Mazarin having in the presence of the conqueror of Rocroy wished to exercise his own will, the latter had made the former clearly comprehend that if he defended him it was neither from conviction nor enthusiasm. Then the cardinal fell back upon the queen, his sole support. But after two or three trials this support seemed to give way under him.

When the hour of audience arrived, the Comte de la Fère was informed that he must wait a short time, as the queen was holding council with the minister. That was true. Paris had just sent a fresh deputation, which sought to give at last some shape to matters, and the queen was consulting with Mazarin on the reception to be given to these deputies.

The minds of the high personages of the State were greatly preoccupied. Athos could not therefore have selected a worse time to speak about his friends, — poor atoms lost in this whirlwind let loose. But Athos was of an inflexible nature, which never vacillated when a decision was once taken, when this seemed to emanate from his conscience and to be dictated by duty. He insisted on being introduced, saying that though he had not been deputed either by M. de Conti, or M. de Beaufort, or M. de Bouillon, or M. d'Elbeuf, or the Coadjutor, or Madame de Longueville, or Broussel, or the parliament, and that he came on his own account, he had none the less important matters to speak of to her Majesty.

When the conference was ended the queen desired him to be called into her cabinet. Athos was introduced.

His name had too often sounded in her Majesty's ears, and vibrated in her heart, for her not to recognize it; yet she remained impassive, contenting herself with looking at this gentleman with the fixed look only permitted to women, queens by their beauty or rank.

"Do you come to offer to do me a service, Count?" asked Anne of Austria, after a moment's silence.

"Yes, Madame, once more a service," said Athos, shocked that the queen did not appear to recognize him.

Athos had a great heart, and therefore made a very poor courtier.

Anne frowned. Mazarin, who was seated at a table and was sorting some papers, as if acting as a simple secretary of state, raised his head.

"Speak," said the queen.

Mazarin again turned over his papers.

"Madame," said Athos, "two of our friends, two of the most intrepid servants of your Majesty, M. d'Artagnan and M. du Vallon, sent to England by Monsieur the Cardinal, have suddenly disappeared, just when they set foot on French soil, and we know not what has become of them."

"Well!" said the queen.

"Well," said Athos, "I address myself to your Majesty's good-will to know what has become of these gentlemen, reserving to myself the right, if necessary, hereafter to appeal to her justice."

"Monsieur," replied Anne of Austria, with that hauteur which, addressed to certain men, became impertinence, "is it for this you disturb me in the midst of the great preoccupations which are agitating us? It is a mere police affair! Eh! Monsieur, you know well enough, or ought to if you do not, that we have no longer knowledge of police matters now we are not in Paris?"

"I believe that your Majesty," said Athos, bowing with cold respect, "would have no need to inquire of the police to know what has become of MM. d'Artagnan and du Vallon, and that if you would ask Monsieur the Cardinal where these gentlemen are, Monsieur the Cardinal would be able to answer you without questioning anything else than his own recollections."

"Why, God pardon me!" said Anne of Austria, with that disdainful movement of her lips peculiar to her, "I think that you are putting the question yourself."

"Yes, Madame, and I have almost the right, for it concerns M. d'Artagnan — M. d'Artagnan, do you understand thoroughly, Madame?" said he, in a manner to make bend the forehead of the queen under the recollections of the woman.

Mazarin saw clearly that it was time to come to the queen's aid.

"Monsieur the Count, I must tell you something of which her Majesty knows nothing. These gentlemen have disobeyed orders, and they are under arrest."

"I then supplicate your Majesty," said Athos, still impassive, and without replying to Mazarin, "to revoke these arrests."

"What you ask of me is a question of discipline, and does not concern me at all, Monsieur," replied the queen.

"M. d'Artagnan never replied so when the service of your Majesty was in question," said Athos, bowing with dignity; and he took two steps backward to regain the door. Mazarin stopped him.

"You also have come from England, Monsieur?" said he, making a sign to the queen, who was visibly growing pale and preparing to give a severe order.

"Yes, I assisted at the last moments of King Charles I. Poor king! guilty at most of weakness, and whom his subjects have punished very severely; for thrones are much shaken nowadays, and no good comes to devoted souls from serving the interests of princes. This was the second time that M. d'Artagnan went to England; the first occasion was for the honor of a great queen, the second was for the life of a great king."

"Monsieur," said Anne of Austria to Mazarin, with a tone of voice the true expression of which her habit of dissimulating could not drive away, "see if anything can be done for these gentlemen."

"Madame," said Mazarin, "I will do whatever your Majesty pleases."

"Do what M. le Comte de la Fère asks. Is not that your name, Monsieur?"

"I have another name, Madame, and that is Athos."

"Madame," said Mazarin, with a smile which showed how easily he could take a hint, "your mind may be at rest; your wishes shall be carried out."

"You have understood, Monsieur?" said the queen.

"Yes, Madame, and I expect nothing less from the justice of your Majesty. So I am to see my friends again, — is it not so, Madame?"

"You are going to see them again; yes, Monsieur. But, by the bye, you belong to the Fronde, do you not?"

"Madame, I serve the king."

"Yes, after your manner."

"My manner is that of all true gentlemen, and I do not know two ways," replied Athos, with hauteur.

"Go then, Monsieur," said the queen, dismissing Athos with a sign; "you have got what you wished to obtain, and we know all we want to know."

Then addressing Mazarin when the door was closed

behind him, "Cardinal," said she, "have that insolent gentleman arrested before he leaves the courtyard."

"I was thinking of that," said Mazarin, "and I am happy that your Majesty has given me an order which I was going to ask of you. These head-breakers who bring into our times the traditions of the other reign trouble us a good deal; and since two of them are already taken, let us add a third."

Athos had not been entirely the dupe of the queen. There was in the tone of her voice something that had struck him, and which seemed threatening even when promising. But he was not a man to go away on a mere suspicion, especially when he had been clearly told that he should see his friends again. He waited, therefore, in one of the rooms adjoining the cabinet where the audience took place, expecting that he would be taken to see them, or they brought to him.

With this expectation he had approached the window, and was looking mechanically into the courtyard. He there saw a deputation of Parisians entering, who came to settle the arrangements for the conference and to salute the queen. There were some members of parliament, justices, and barristers, among whom also were a few gentlemen with swords. An imposing escort awaited them at the gates.

Athos looked with more attention, for in the midst of the crowd he thought he recognized some one, when he felt himself lightly touched on the shoulder. He turned round.

"Ah! M. de Comminges!" said he.

"Yes, Monsieur the Count, it is I, and charged with a duty for which I beg you to accept my excuses."

"What is that, Monsieur?"

"Be pleased to give me your sword, Count."

Athos smiled, and opening the window :

" Aramis ! " he called out.

A gentleman turned round. It was Aramis. He bowed in a friendly way to the count.

" Aramis," said Athos, " I am arrested."

" Well," Aramis phlegmatically answered.

" Monsieur," said Athos, turning towards Comminges and giving him politely his sword by the hilt, " here is my sword ; please to take good care of it, and to restore it when I leave prison. I value it much. It was given by King Francis I. to my grandfather. In his time they armed gentlemen, they did not disarm them. Now, where are you taking me ? "

" Why, into my room first. The queen will settle where to put you later on."

Athos followed Comminges without adding another word.

CHAPTER XL.

THE ROYALTY OF M. DE MAZARIN.

The arrest had made no noise, caused no scandal, and was hardly known. It had in no respect impeded the course of events, and the deputation sent by the city of Paris was solemnly informed that it would be received in audience by the queen.

The queen received it, silent and proud as usual. She listened to the grievances and supplications of the deputies; but when they had finished their discourse, no one could have said, from Anne of Austria's looks of unconcern, that she had attended to them. By way of compensation, Mazarin, who was present at the audience, listened attentively to what these deputies asked. It was his own dismissal in clear and precise terms.

The speeches ended, the queen remaining silent, Mazarin said: "Messieurs, I join with you in supplicating the queen to put an end to her subjects' ills. I have done all I can to alleviate them, and yet the public belief, so you say, is that they proceed from me, a poor foreigner, who has not succeeded in pleasing the French. Alas! I am not understood, and the reason is evident: I succeeded a man of the grandest type, who had till that time upheld the sceptre of the sovereigns of France. The memory of M. de Richelieu crushes me. If I were ambitious I should vainly struggle against it; but I am not so, and I desire to give you a proof of this. I declare

myself beaten. I will do what the people ask. If the Parisians have wrongs — and who has not, Messieurs? — Paris has been punished enough, enough blood has been shed, enough misery has fallen on a city deprived both of king and justice. It is not for me, a simple individual, to assume such importance as to divide a queen from her kingdom. Since you demand my retirement, well — I will retire."

"Then," said Aramis, in a whisper to his neighbor, "peace is concluded, and the conference useless. Nothing more is needed than to send M. Mazarin under a good guard to the frontier, and to see that he does not return."

"Wait a moment, Monsieur," said the lawyer to whom Aramis spoke. "Hang it, how you hurry along! It is clear that you are a military man. There is a list of rewards and indemnities to be made clear."

"Monsieur the Chancellor," said the queen, turning towards our old acquaintance Séguier, "you will open the conference; it will take place at Rueil. Monsieur the Cardinal has said things which have greatly moved me. That is why I do not answer you at greater length. As to the question who is to stay or go, I have too much gratitude for Monsieur the Cardinal not to allow him to act freely in all respects. Monsieur the Cardinal will do what he pleases."

A fleeting pallor clouded the intelligent face of the Premier. He looked at the queen with uneasiness. Her face was so impassive that he, like the rest, could not read what was passing in her heart.

"But," added the queen, "while awaiting M. de Mazarin's decision, let there be question only of the king."

The deputies bowed and went out.

"What!" said the queen, when the last of them had

left the room; "you would give in to these lawyers and barristers."

"For your Majesty's happiness," said Mazarin, fixing his piercing eye on the queen, "there is no sacrifice I am not ready to put upon myself."

Anne drooped her head, and fell into one of those reveries so habitual to her. The remembrance of Athos came to her mind. His bold mien, his firm, and at the same time, dignified language, the visions which he had called up, reminded her of a past of an intoxicating poetry, — youth, beauty, the brightness of the love of twenty; the rough combats of her supporters, and the bloody end of Buckingham, the only man she had really loved; and the heroism of these obscure defenders, who had saved her from the double hatred of Richelieu and the king.

Mazarin looked at her; and now that she believed herself alone, and was no longer watched by a crowd of enemies, he traced her thoughts upon her countenance, as one sees the clouds passing across transparent lakes, reflections of the sky.

"It is necessary," she murmured, "to yield to the storm, purchase a peace, and wait patiently for better times."

Mazarin smiled bitterly at this proposition, which showed that she had taken the minister's proposal quite seriously.

Anne had not seen this smile, but observing that her demand met with no response, she raised her head.

"Well! you do not reply, Cardinal; what are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking, Madame, that that impudent man, whose arrest we have just ordered, made allusion to Buckingham, whom you allowed to be assassinated; to Madame de Chevreuse, whom you exiled; to M. de Beaufort, whom you imprisoned. But if he made allu-

sion to me, it is because he does not know what I am to you."

Anne of Austria trembled as she ever did when wounded in her pride. She blushed, and pressed her sharp nails into her handsome hands instead of replying.

"He is a man of good counsel, honor, and mind, besides being a man of determination. You know something of these qualities, do you not, Madame? I want therefore to tell him, — it is a personal favor I am asking, — in what he is mistaken respecting me. It is this really, — that what is proposed to me is almost an abdication, and this requires reflection."

"An abdication!" said Anne; "I believe, Monsieur, that it is only kings who abdicate."

"Well!" replied Mazarin, "am I not almost a king, and king of France, even? When thrown on the foot of a royal bed, I assure you, Madame, that my minister's robe resembles at night a royal cloak."

This was one of the humiliations which Mazarin most frequently subjected her to, and under which she constantly bent her head.

It was only Elizabeth and Catharine II. who remained at once mistresses and queens to their lovers.

Anne of Austria looked with a sort of terror at the menacing countenance of the cardinal, who at these times was not without a certain greatness.

"Monsieur, have I not said, and have you not understood that I said to these people that you should do what you pleased?"

"In that case I believe I must please myself by remaining. It is not only my own interest, but, I may even dare to say, your safety."

"Stay then, Monsieur, I desire nothing else; but then don't let me be insulted."

"You are speaking of the revolters' pretensions, and of the tone in which they express them. Patience! They have selected a field on which I am a more skilful general than they — the conference. We shall beat them only by temporizing. They are already short of food; it will be worse in a week."

"Eh! good heavens! — yes, Monsieur, I knew that it will come to that. But it is not of them only that the question is; it is not they who inflict the worst wounds on me."

"Ah! I understand you. You refer to those remembrances which these three or four gentlemen perpetually call forth. But we hold them prisoners, and they are just guilty enough to allow us to hold them in captivity as long as we like; only one is out of our power and defies us. But, the devil! we shall succeed in sending him to join his companions. We have done many things more difficult than that, I think. I have shut up at Rueil, under my own eyes, within the reach of my hand, the two most intractable. This very day the third shall join them."

"So long as they are prisoners it will be all right, but they will go forth one day or other."

"Yes, if your Majesty gives them their liberty."

"Ah," continued Anne, replying to her own thoughts, "that 's why I regret Paris!"

"And why so?"

"For the Bastille, Monsieur, which is so strong and discreet."

"Madame, with the conference we shall have peace; with peace, Paris; with Paris, the Bastille. Our four Hectors will rot there."

Anne of Austria slightly frowned while Mazarin kissed her hand to take leave. Mazarin went away after this

action, half-humble, half-gallant. Anne of Austria followed him with her eyes, and as he got farther away, a smile of contempt was imprinted on her lips.

"I have despised," she murmured, "the love of a cardinal who never said 'I will do,' but 'I have done.' He knew safer retreats than Rueil, darker and more silent even than the Bastille. Oh, the degenerate world!"

CHAPTER XLI.

PRECAUTIONS.

After having left Anne of Austria, Mazarin started for Rueil, where his house was. He took a strong retinue on account of the troublous state of the times, and he often went in disguise. The cardinal, as we have already said, in the dress of a man wearing a sword was a fine-looking gentleman. In the courtyard of the old château he entered a coach and proceeded to the Seine at Chatou. Monsieur the Prince had furnished an escort of fifty light-horse, not so much for protection as to show the deputies how easily the queen's generals disposed of their troops, and could send them about at their will.

Athos, whom Comminges kept in sight, was on horseback, but without sword. He followed the cardinal without saying a word. Grimaud, who had been left at the gate of the château by his master, had heard the news of Athos's arrest when he called out to Aramis; and on a sign from the count he had gone without a word to take a place near Aramis as if nothing had happened. In fact Grimaud during his twenty-two years in Athos's service had seen the latter escape so many risks that nothing any further troubled him.

The deputies, immediately after their audience, had gone back to Paris; that is, they had preceded the cardinal by about five hundred yards. Athos was therefore able to see before him the back of Aramis, whose gilt sword-belt and proud mien attracted his notice among the crowd

quite as much as did the hope of deliverance which he put in him, and the sort of attraction which flows from a close friendship.

Aramis, on the contrary, did not seem in the least anxious whether Athos were behind him or not. Once he turned round, it is true; that was on arriving at the château. He supposed that Mazarin would perhaps leave there his new prisoner in the redoubt of the château, with a sentinel to guard him. But that was not the case. Athos passed Chatou in the cardinal's suite.

At the branching off of the road from Paris to Rueil, Aramis turned round. This time his expectation was not wrong. Mazarin took the right-hand road; and Aramis could see the prisoner disappear at the turn among the trees. Athos, at that very moment struck by a similar thought, looked behind also. The two friends exchanged simple nods, and Aramis put up his finger to his hat as if to salute him. Athos alone understood by this sign that his friend had a project.

Ten minutes after, Mazarin entered the court of the château, which his predecessor, the cardinal, had put at his disposal at Rueil. As soon as he stepped out of his coach, Comminges drew near.

"Monseigneur," he asked him, "where does it please your Eminence to quarter M. de la Fère?"

"Why, in the pavilion of the orangery, facing the pavilion of the guard. I wish every respect paid to M. le Comte de la Fère, so long as he is her Majesty's prisoner."

"Monseigneur," Comminges ventured to say, "he asks the favor of being taken to M. d'Artagnan, who occupies the hunting pavilion facing the orangery."

Mazarin reflected a moment. Comminges saw he was pondering it.

"It is a very strong post," he added; "forty trusty men, nearly all Germans, and therefore having no interest in the Fronde, or relations with it."

"If we put these three men together, we must double the post; and we have not men enough to let us do that."

Comminges smiled; Mazarin saw the smile, and understood it.

"You don't know them, M. de Comminges; but I do, personally and by tradition. I charged them to help King Charles, and they, for this end, did miraculous things; destiny alone has prevented King Charles from being now in safety among us."

"But if they have served your Eminence so well, why are they kept in prison?"

"In prison! and how long has Rueil been a prison?"

"Since there have been prisoners."

"These gentlemen are not my prisoners, Comminges," said Mazarin, with a crafty smile; "they are my guests, and so prized that I have barred the windows and put bolts to the doors, for fear they should get tired of my company. But prisoners though they seem, I for all that esteem them greatly; and the proof is I want to pay a visit to M. de la Fère for a *tête-à-tête* conversation. So, not to be disturbed, you will take him to the pavilion in the orangery, as I have already told you; and in taking my customary walk there, I will go in and have a talk with him. Much as he seems my enemy, I have great sympathy for him, and if he is amenable to reason, perhaps we shall accomplish something."

Comminges bowed, and returned to Athos, who with apparent calmness, but really with uneasiness, awaited the result of the conference.

"Well?"

"Monsieur," replied Comminges, "it seems quite impossible,"

"M. de Comminges," said Athos, "I have been all my life a soldier, and know what orders are; but outside these you might be able to do me a service."

"I am heartily willing, Monsieur, since I know who you are, and what services you rendered her Majesty, formerly; since also I know how interested you are in that young man who came so bravely to my help on the day when that old fool of a Broussel was arrested; and, saving my orders, I am at your service entirely."

"Thanks, Monsieur; I ask nothing more, and I am going to ask that which will not compromise you at all."

"If it compromise me only a little, Monsieur," said Comminges, smiling, "keep on asking. I do not care for M. Mazarin much more than you do. I serve the queen, and this naturally leads me to serve the cardinal; but I serve the one joyfully, and the other against my will. Speak, therefore, I beg of you, — I will listen."

"Since no inconvenience arises from my knowing that M. d'Artagnan is here, there can't be more, I presume, in his knowing that I am here?"

"I have received no orders to that effect, Monsieur."

"Well, do me the pleasure of presenting my respects, and tell him I am his neighbor. You will also tell him that M. de Mazarin has put me in the pavilion of the orangery in order to pay me a visit, and tell him also that I shall use this honor to obtain some amelioration of our captivity."

"Which cannot last," added Comminges; "Monsieur the Cardinal told me so himself. There is no prison here."

"There are some *oubliettes*," said Athos, smiling.

"Oh! that's another thing. Yes, I know there are traditions about them; but a man of low birth like the cardinal, an Italian come to seek his fortune in France, would not dare to use such extremes towards men like us; that would be an enormity. That was well enough in the time of the other cardinal, who was a great seigneur; but M. Mazarin, come now! — *oubliettes* are a royal form of vengeance which a rogue like him must not employ. Your arrest is known, and that of your friends will soon be known, Monsieur, and all the nobility of France will demand of him an account of your disappearance. No, no, rest easy; the *oubliettes* of Rueil have become for ten years traditions for the use of children. Rest in this place without any anxiety. I will on my part inform M. d'Artagnan that you are here. Who knows but that in a fortnight you may render me some similar service?"

"I, Monsieur?"

"Eh! without doubt; can I not become the prisoner of Monsieur the Coadjutor?"

"Be sure that in that case, Monsieur," said Athos, bowing, "I should endeavor to please you."

"Will you do me the honor of supping with me, Monsieur the Count?"

"Thanks, Monsieur, I feel out of sorts, and you would pass a dull evening. Thanks."

Comminges then led the count to a room on the ground-floor of a pavilion continuous with the orangery, and on a level with it. The latter was reached by a large court, crowded with soldiers and courtiers. This court, of a horseshoe shape, had at its centre the apartments of M. de Mazarin, and at each of its wings the hunting pavilion, where D'Artagnan was, and the pavilion of the orangery, where Athos had just been taken. Behind the extremities of these wings the park extended.

Athos, on entering his room, saw through the window, which was carefully barred, walls and roofs.

"What building is that?" he said.

"The back of the hunting pavilion, where your friends are detained. Unfortunately the windows which look this way were blocked up in the time of the other cardinal, for more than once the buildings have served as a prison, and M. de Mazarin in putting you here only restores them to their first destination. If those windows were not blocked up, you would have had the consolation of corresponding by signs with your friends."

"And are you sure, M. de Comminges," said Athos, "that the cardinal will honor me with a visit?"

"He has at least assured me so, Monsieur."

Athos sighed when he saw the barred windows.

"Yes, it 's true," said Comminges, "it is almost a prison. Nothing is wanting, not even the bars. But, really, what a strange idea must have seized you, who are a flower of nobility, to go and waste your bravery and loyalty among all those mushrooms of the Fronde! You, a Frondeur! the Comte de la Fère of the party of a Broussel, a Blancmesnil, a Viole! Fie now! That makes me believe that your mother was some little lawyer's daughter. You a Frondeur!"

"Upon my word, my dear Monsieur, one must be either of Mazarin's party or a Frondeur. I have often heard these two names resound in my ears, and I have pronounced in favor of the latter. At any rate it is a French name. And then I am a Frondeur with M. de Beaufort, M. de Bouillon, M. d'Elbeuf; with princes, not with judges, councillors, and lawyers. And then, what an agreeable result for serving Monsieur the Cardinal! Look at that wall without windows, it will tell you fine things about Mazarin's gratitude."

"Yes," replied Comminges, laughing; "and especially if it repeat all the maledictions which M. d'Artagnan has let fly at him the last week."

"Poor D'Artagnan!" said Athos, with that charming melancholy which formed one of the features of his disposition; "a man so brave, so good, so terrible to those who love not those whom he loves. You have two fierce prisoners, M. de Comminges, and I pity you if these two redoubtable men have been put into your charge."

"Redoubtable!" said Comminges, smiling; "eh! Monsieur, you want to frighten me. The first day of his imprisonment, M. d'Artagnan challenged all the soldiers and non-commissioned officers, in order doubtless to have a sword. That lasted to the next day, and even to the day after; but then he became calm and gentle as a lamb. Now he sings Gascon songs which make us die of laughter."

"And M. du Vallon?"

"Ah! he — that's another matter. I confess he is a terrible gentleman. The first day he forced all the doors with a single push from his shoulder, and I was expecting to see him leave Rueil as Samson came forth from Gaza. But his humor has followed the same course as that of M. d'Artagnan. Now he is not only used to his captivity, but he even makes a joke of it."

"So much the better," said Athos.

"Were you expecting, then, something else?" Comminges asked, who putting together what Mazarin had said of his prisoners with what the count had said, began to feel some anxiety.

Athos for his part was thinking that this amelioration in the conduct of his friends grew certainly out of some plan formed by D'Artagnan. He did not, therefore, wish to harm them by singing their praises too much.

"They?" said he; "they are of an inflammable disposition. One is a Gascon, the other a Picard; they set one another on fire, but they are quickly put out. You have a proof of that, and what you have just told me proves what I say to be true."

It was Comminges's opinion; so he withdrew more reassured, and Athos remained alone in that vast room, where, according to the cardinal's orders, he was treated as a gentleman. Besides, he was awaiting the famous promised visit of Mazarin in order to form a clear idea of his position.

CHAPTER XLII.

STRENGTH OF MIND AND STRENGTH OF ARM.

Now let us cross over to the hunting pavilion. At the end of the court, where through a portico formed of Ionic columns some dog-kennels were seen, arose an oblong building, which seemed to stretch like an arm before this other arm, the orangery pavilion, — a semicircle enclosing the court of honor. It was in this pavilion, on the ground-floor, that D'Artagnan and Porthos were shut up, sharing the long hours of a captivity hateful to two such temperaments.

D'Artagnan was going up and down like a tiger, his eye fixed, sometimes growling hoarsely, before the bars of a long window looking out of a back courtyard. Porthos was digesting in silence a good dinner, the remains of which had just been removed. The one seemed deprived of reason, and was thinking; the other seemed meditating profoundly, and was sleeping. Only his sleep was a nightmare, which could be guessed from the incoherent and broken manner with which he was snoring.

"See," said D'Artagnan, "the day is sinking. It must be about four o'clock. It will soon be a hundred and eighty-three hours that we have been in here."

"Hm!" grunted Porthos, pretending to reply.

"Do you hear, you eternal sleeper?" said D'Artagnan, out of patience that any one should sleep by day when he had the greatest difficulty to sleep at night.

"What?" said Porthos.

"I say that we have been shut up here a hundred and eighty-three hours."

"It 's your fault," said Porthos.

"What do you mean? — it 's my fault."

"Yes, I have offered to get us both out."

"By removing a bar or breaking open a door?"

"Certainly."

"Porthos, men like us don't get away purely and simply."

"Upon my word, I would get away with that purity and simplicity which you seem to despise so much."

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders.

"And then, merely escaping from this room is not all."

"My dear friend, you seem to-day in a little better humor than you were yesterday. Explain how getting out of this room is not all."

"It is not all, because having neither arms nor password, we should not take fifty steps in the courtyard without meeting a sentinel."

"Well," said Porthos, "we should knock him down and take his arms."

"Yes; but before doing that, the Swiss, who has a tough life, would utter a cry or at least a groan which would bring out the guard. We should be tracked and taken like foxes, we who are lions, and thrown into some underground dungeon, where we should not have even the consolation of seeing this frightful gray sky of Rueil, which is no more like the sky of Tarbes than the moon is like the sun. Hang it all! if we had some one outside who could give us some information on the moral and physical topography of this château, about that which Cæsar called *mores locaque*, as I have been told, at least — Ah! when one thinks that during twenty years when I

had nothing to do, the idea never entered my mind of employing one of those idle hours in coming to study Rueil."

"What does that signify?" said Porthos. "Let us get away, all the same."

"My dear fellow," said D'Artagnan, "do you know why master cooks never work with their own hands?"

"No; but I should be glad to know."

"Because they would be afraid of making, before their pupils, tarts too much baked or creams that have turned."

"Well?"

"Well, they would get laughed at, and master cooks must not allow themselves to be laughed at."

"And why are master cooks at all like us?"

"Because we ought, in our adventures, never to suffer any check, nor give occasion for people to laugh at us. In England we were checked and beaten, and that 's a blot on our reputation."

"By whom, now, were we beaten?"

"By Mordaunt."

"Yes; but we have drowned him."

"I know that, and that will rehabilitate us a little in the eyes of posterity, if posterity trouble themselves about us. But listen to me, Porthos. Although M. Mordaunt was not to be despised, M. Mazarin is quite a different person, whom we could not so easily drown. Let us be careful then and work cautiously, for," added D'Artagnan with a sigh, "while we two are worth eight others, perhaps, we are not equal to the four whom you know."

"That 's true," said Porthos, answering D'Artagnan's sigh by his own.

"Well, Porthos, do as I do; walk up and down till some news of our friends reach us, or some bright idea strikes us; but don't be sleeping always as you do; there

is nothing which stupefies so much as sleep. As for what awaits us, it is perhaps less serious than we thought it at first. I don't think M. de Mazarin thinks of cutting our heads off, because this can only follow a trial, and that makes a stir which would attract our friends' notice, and they would not let M. de Mazarin do it,"

"How well you reason?" said Porthos with genuine admiration.

"Well, yes, not badly. And then, you see, if we are not tried nor our heads cut off, they must guard us here or elsewhere."

"Yes, that follows of necessity."

"Well, it is impossible that M. Aramis, that keen-scented hound, and Athos, that wise gentleman, should not discover our retreat; then, my faith, it will be time."

"Yes; and one is not badly off here, one thing, however, excepted."

"What is that?"

"Have n't you noticed, D'Artagnan, that they have given us baked mutton three days running?"

"No; but if they give it us a fourth time I will complain of it. Don't be disturbed."

"And then sometimes I miss my home; it is a long time since I visited my châteaus."

"Bah! forget them for a time; we shall get back to them, unless at least M. Mazarin should have them razed to the ground."

"Do you believe he would be allowed to be so tyrannical?" asked Porthos, with some anxiety.

"No; it was all very well for the other cardinal to do such things. Ours is too mean to risk doing them."

"You set my mind at rest, D'Artagnan."

"Well, then, put on a good face as I do; joke with the guards, interest the soldiers, since you cannot corrupt

them; cajole them more than you do when they come near the bars. Up to the present you have only shown them your fist, and the more it asks respect the less does it attract. Ah! I would give a good deal to have five hundred louis only."

"And I also," said Porthos, who did not wish to be behind D'Artagnan in generosity. "I would give readily a hundred pistoles."

The two prisoners had come to this point in their conversation when Comminges entered, preceded by a sergeant and two men who brought supper in a hamper filled with basins and plates.

CHAPTER XLIII.

STRENGTH OF MIND AND STRENGTH OF ARM

(concluded).

"I say," said Porthos, "here's mutton again!"

"My dear M. de Comminges," said D'Artagnan, "you must know that my friend, M. du Vallon, is determined to go to the last extremities if M. de Mazarin persists in feeding him on this sort of meat."

"I declare even," said Porthos, "that I will eat of nothing else unless they take it away."

"Take away the mutton," said Comminges; "I hope M. du Vallon may sup pleasantly, especially as I have a piece of news which will, I am sure, give him a good appetite."

"Is M. de Mazarin dead?"

"I regret to tell you he is wondrously well."

"So much the worse," said Porthos.

"And what is the news?" asked D'Artagnan. "News is so rare a fruit in prison that you will, I hope, excuse my impatience, will you not, M. de Comminges? — and so much the more as we hear that the news is good."

"Would you be glad to hear that M. le Comte de la Fère is very well?"

D'Artagnan's small eyes opened their widest.

"Should I be glad?" he exclaimed, — "more than glad, — I should be happy."

"Well, I am desired by himself to present you his best compliments, and to tell you he is in good health."

D'Artagnan almost leaped with joy. A swift glance translated his thoughts to Porthos. "If Athos knows where we are," said this look, if it could speak, "before long Athos will act."

Porthos was not very acute in understanding glances; but this time, as he had, at the name of Athos, experienced the same impression as D'Artagnan, he comprehended.

"But," asked the Gascon, timidly, "Monsieur the Count, you say, has sent his compliments to M. du Vallon and myself? You have then seen him?"

"Certainly."

"Where? — if I may ask."

"Very near here," replied Comminges, smiling.

"Very near here," repeated D'Artagnan, whose eyes sparkled.

"So near that if the windows which look on to the orangery were not blocked up, you would see him from where you are."

"He prowls about the neighborhood of the château," thought D'Artagnan. Then aloud: "You met him while hunting in the park, perhaps?" said he.

"No, no, nearer, — much nearer. Look, behind this wall," said Comminges, striking against the wall.

"Behind this wall? What is there behind it? They brought me here at night-time, so may the devil take me if I know where I am."

"Well," said Comminges, "suppose one thing."

"I will suppose what you like."

"Suppose there is a window in this wall. Well, from it you would see M. de la Fère at his window."

"He is then staying at the château?"

"Yes."

"By what right?"

"The same right as you."

"Athos a prisoner, then?"

"You know very well," said Comminges, laughing, "that there are no prisoners at Rueil, since there is no prison."

"Don't play on the words, Monsieur; Athos has been arrested?"

"Yesterday at St. Germain, on leaving the queen's presence."

D'Artagnan's arms fell motionless by his side. He looked thunderstruck. A pallor passed like a white cloud across his embrowned face, but disappeared almost immediately.

"Prisoner!" he repeated.

"Prisoner!" Porthos repeated after him, very much depressed.

Suddenly D'Artagnan raised his head, and there was a light in his eyes imperceptible to Porthos himself. Then the same dejection which had preceded it took its place.

"Come, come," said Comminges, who had a real liking for D'Artagnan since the signal service the latter had rendered him on the day of Broussel's arrest in rescuing him from the Parisians; "come, don't be cast down. I did not mean to bring you sad news, far from it. In the present war all is uncertainty. Be pleased rather at the chance which brings your friend close to you and M. du Vallon, instead of being cast down."

But this remark had no influence on D'Artagnan, who kept his melancholy looks.

"And how did he look?" asked Porthos, who seeing that D'Artagnan let the conversation drop, took advantage to interpose his word.

"Oh, very well," said Comminges. "At first, like yourselves, he seemed very cast down, but when he knew

that Monsieur the Cardinal was going to pay him a visit this very evening —"

"Ah," uttered D'Artagnan; "Monsieur the Cardinal means to visit the Comte de la Fère?"

"Yes, he told him beforehand; and Monsieur the Count, on learning this, has desired me to tell you that he would profit by this to plead your cause as well as his own."

"Ah, the dear Count!" said D'Artagnan.

"A fine affair," growled Porthos, "a great favor! Good heavens! Monsieur the Comte de la Fère, whose family is connected with the Montmorencys and the Rohans, is quite equal to M. de Mazarin."

"No matter," said D'Artagnan, in his calmest tones; "on due reflection, my dear Vallon, it is a great honor for Monsieur the Count. It is a hopeful sign; in my opinion the honor is so great that I think M. de Comminges is mistaken."

"What! I am mistaken! No, no, no," said Comminges, who aimed at establishing the facts in all their exactness. "I perfectly understood what the cardinal told me. He will visit the Comte de la Fère."

D'Artagnan tried to catch Porthos's eye to see if he understood the importance of this visit, but he failed to do so.

"It is the custom, then, of Monsieur the Cardinal to walk in his orangery?"

"He shuts himself up there every evening. It would appear that there he meditates on state affairs."

"Then," said D'Artagnan, "I begin to think that M. de la Fère will receive a visit from his Eminence; besides, he will be accompanied doubtless."

"Yes; by two soldiers."

"And he will talk of matters before two strangers?"

"The soldiers are Swiss, from the small cantons where

they speak only German. Besides, in all probability they will wait at the gate."

D'Artagnan drove the nails into the palms of his hands to prevent his face from expressing anything but what he wished it to express.

"Let M. de Mazarin take care of being alone with M. le Comte de la Fère, for the latter must be furious."

Comminges began to laugh. "Oh, come! really, one would think that you were anthropophagi! M. de la Fère is courteous; besides, he has no arms; at the first cry of his Eminence, the two soldiers who always accompany him would run to him."

"Two soldiers," said D'Artagnan, appearing to recall his recollection; "two soldiers, — yes; that is why I hear two men called every evening, and why I see them walking sometimes for half an hour under my window."

"That is it; they wait for the Cardinal, or rather Bernouin, who comes and calls them when the Cardinal goes out."

"Fine fellows, upon my word!"

"It is the regiment which was at Lens, and which Monsieur the Prince has given to the Cardinal to do him honor."

"Ah, Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, as if to sum up the whole of this long conversation, "perhaps his Eminence will grow mild, and grant our liberty to M. de la Fère."

"I heartily wish it," said Comminges.

"Then if he forget this visit, you would not object to remind him of it?"

"No, certainly."

"Ah! that gives me a little more tranquillity."

This clever change of the conversation would have seemed a sublime manœuvre to any one who could have read the Gascon's soul.

"Now," he continued, "a last favor, I beg of you, my dear M. de Comminges."

"Quite at your service, Monsieur."

"You will see M. le Comte de la Fère again?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Will you wish him good-day for us, and ask him to beg for me the same favor he has obtained for himself?"

"You wish, then, that Monsieur the Cardinal should come here?"

"No; I am not so bold, nor exacting. If his Eminence will do me the honor of listening to me, that is all I desire."

"Oh!" murmured Porthos, shaking his head, "I should never have thought that of my friend here. How misfortune lowers a man!"

"It shall be done," said Comminges.

"Also assure the Count that I am quite well, and that you have found me sad, but resigned."

"You please me, Monsieur, by saying that."

"You will say the same thing for M. du Vallon?"

"For me, — not at all," exclaimed Porthos. "I am not resigned at all."

"He will become so, M. de Comminges. I know him better than he knows himself, and I know a thousand excellent qualities in him which he does not even suspect. Be silent, my dear Vallon, and be resigned."

"Adieu, Messieurs. Good night."

Comminges left. D'Artagnan looked after him with the same humble and resigned look. But scarcely was the door closed than rushing up to Porthos, he embraced him with a joy which could not be mistaken.

"Oh, oh!" said Porthos, "what is the matter now? Have you gone mad, my poor friend?"

"The matter is, — we are saved!"

"I do not at all understand you," said Porthos, "I see on the contrary that we are all prisoners, with the exception of Aramis, and that our chances of getting out are diminished since one more of us has entered the mouse-trap of M. de Mazarin."

"Not at all, Porthos, my friend; this mouse-trap was strong enough for two, but it becomes too weak for three."

"I do not understand at all," said Porthos.

"No matter; sit down to table and get some strength; we shall need it to-night."

"What shall we do then to-night?" asked Porthos, more and more puzzled.

"We shall travel probably."

"But —"

"Sit down, dear friend; ideas come while eating. After supper, when my ideas have taken shape, I will let you know them."

Whatever desire Porthos had of being informed of D'Artagnan's plan, as he knew the latter's mode of acting he seated himself at table without insisting further, and ate with an appetite which did honor to his confidence in D'Artagnan's imagination.

CHAPTER XLIV.

STRENGTH OF ARM AND STRENGTH OF MIND.

The supper was silent, but not sad; for from time to time one of those shrewd smiles which were habitual to him in his moments of good humor, illumined the countenance of D'Artagnan. Porthos did not lose one of those smiles, and at each of them uttered some exclamation which showed his friend that, although he did not understand it, he had not lost sight of the plan which was working in D'Artagnan's brain.

At dessert D'Artagnan sat in his chair with his legs crossed, and with the look of a man thoroughly satisfied with himself. Porthos rested his face on his hands, put his elbows on the table, and looked at D'Artagnan with that air of confidence which gave this Colossus such an admirable appearance of good nature.

"Well?" said D'Artagnan, at the end of an instant.

"Well?" repeated Porthos.

"You said then, dear friend —"

"I! I was saying nothing."

"Yes, indeed; you were saying that you wanted to go out from here."

"Ah! as for that, yes; it is not the desire which is wanting."

"And you added that, to go out from here, it was only necessary to open a door or a wall."

"It is true I was saying that, and I even say it still."

"And I answered you, Porthos, that it was a bad way, and that we should not go a hundred paces without being captured and knocked on the head, unless we had dresses to disguise us and arms to defend us."

"It is true, we need dresses and arms."

"Well," said D'Artagnan getting up, "we have them, friend Porthos, and even something better."

"Bah!" said Porthos, looking around him.

"Don't search, it 's useless; all those will come to us at the right time. About what hour did we see two Swiss guards walking up and down yesterday?" asked D'Artagnan.

"One hour, I think, after night had fallen."

"If they come out to-day at the same time as yesterday, we shall only have a quarter of an hour to await the pleasure of seeing them."

"Only a quarter of an hour at the most."

"You always have your arm in fair condition, is n't it so, Porthos?"

Porthos unbuttoned, and pulling up his sleeve regarded with satisfaction his nervous arms, as large as the thighs of ordinary men.

"Yes," said he, "pretty good."

"So that you could make, without much difficulty, a circle out of these tongs, and a corkscrew out of this shovel?"

"Certainly," said Porthos.

"Let us see," said D'Artagnan.

The giant took the two objects named, and effected with the greatest ease and without any apparent effort the two metamorphoses desired by his companion.

"There," said he.

"Magnificent!" said D'Artagnan, "and truly you are gifted, Porthos."

"I have heard," said Porthos, "of a certain Milo of Crotona who did some very extraordinary things, as tying a cord around his forehead and breaking it; of killing an ox with a blow of his fist and carrying it home on his shoulders; of stopping a horse by his hind feet, etc. I made them relate to me all his prowesses down there at Pierrefonds, and I have done all that he did, except breaking a cord by swelling my temples."

"It is because your strength is not in your head, Porthos," said D'Artagnan.

"No; it is in my arms and in my shoulders," replied Porthos, naïvely.

"Well, my friend, come near the window and use your strength to unbed a bar. Wait till I extinguish the light."

CHAPTER XLV.

STRENGTH OF ARM AND STRENGTH OF MIND (*concluded*).

Porthos took hold of one of the window-bars with both hands, threw his strength into them, and pulled it towards him, making it bend like a bow, so that the two ends came from the holes in the stone where for thirty years the cement had held them.

"Well, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "that is something which the cardinal never could have done, man of genius as he is."

"Is there any need to tear away any others?"

"Oh, no, that is sufficient; a man's body can pass through."

Porthos tried, and his whole body went through. "Yes," said he.

"Now, pass your arm —"

"Through where?"

"Through this opening."

"What to do?"

"You will know presently. Pass it."

"Porthos obeyed, docile as a soldier, and passed his arm through the bars.

"Wonderfully well!" said D'Artagnan.

"It appears that that goes well?"

"On wheels, dear friend."

"Now what must I do?"

"Nothing."

"It is then finished?"

"Not yet."

"I should like, however, to understand better," said Porthos.

"Listen, and in two words you will be *au fait*. The door of the guard-house opens, as you see."

"Yes, I see."

"They are going to send into our courtyard, which M. de Mazarin crosses to get to the orangery, the two guards who accompany him."

"It is they who are coming out."

"Provided that they close the door of the post. Good! they close it."

"What next?"

"Silence! they might hear us."

"I shall know nothing then."

"Yes, indeed, for as fast as you execute you will understand."

"However, I should have preferred —"

"You will have the pleasure of the surprise."

"That 's true," said Porthos.

"Hush!"

Porthos remained silent and immovable. The two soldiers came near the window, rubbing their hands, for it was the month of February, and it was cold. At that moment the door of the guard-house opened, and one of the soldiers was recalled. The soldier left his comrade and returned to the guard-room.

"Is it working aright?" said Porthos.

"Better than ever," replied D'Artagnan. "Now, listen; I am going to call this soldier and talk to him, as I did yesterday with one of his comrades."

"Yes, only I did n't understand a word of what he said."

"The fact is that his accent was a little strong, but do

not lose a word of what I am going to tell you; all is in the execution, Porthos."

"Good! execution is my strong point."

"I know it well, *pardieu!* so I count on you."

"Speak."

"I am going to call the soldier and talk with him."

"You have already said so."

"I shall turn myself to the left so that he will be on your right as soon as he has got on to the bench.

"But suppose he does not get up on it."

"He is sure to do so, don't fear. Directly he does, you stretch out your arm and seize him by the neck. Then lifting him you will draw him into our room, taking care to seize him tight enough to prevent him from crying out."

"Yes," said Porthos, "but suppose I strangle him."

"Well, it will be only a Swiss the less; but you will not do so, I hope. You will put him down gently, and we will gag him, and fasten him, no matter where, to something or other. That will give us a uniform and a sword."

"Wonderful!" said Porthos, looking at D'Artagnan with the most profound admiration; "but one uniform and one sword are not enough for two."

"Well, but has he not a comrade?"

"That is true."

"Then when I cough, put out your arm. It will be time."

"Good."

The two friends took their indicated positions. Placed as he was, Porthos was entirely hidden behind the angle of the window.

"Good evening, comrade," said D'Artagnan, with his most pleasant tones and the most moderate notes of his diapason.

"Goot evening, Monsir," replied the soldier.

"I believe a glass of wine would not be disagreeable to you."

"A glass of fine would be velcome."

"The fish bites! the fish bites!" murmured D'Artagnan to Porthos. Then to the soldier, "I have a bottle here."

"A bottel full?"

"Quite full, and it is for you if you wish to drink my health."

"Eheh! much bleasure," said the soldier, approaching.

"Well, come and take it, my friend," said the Gascon.

"Ferry villingly. Gut ting, there is a pench!"

"Oh! eh! one might say that it was put there on purpose. Get up! There, that 's it, my friend."

And D'Artagnan coughed. At the same moment Porthos's arm fell as swift as lightning, and, with a grip like pincers, his steel fist seized the soldier's neck, and raised him while choking him. He drew him to him through the opening, at the risk of flaying him, and laid him on the ground, where D'Artagnan gagged him with his scarf, and then began to strip him with the promptitude and dexterity of one who has learned his trade on the battle-field.

Then the soldier, garroted and gagged, was deposited in the fireplace, the fire of which our friends had previously extinguished.

"Here is at any rate a sword and a uniform," said Porthos.

"I take these," said D'Artagnan. "If you wish another of each, we must make another turn. Attention! I see the other soldier, coming out from the guard-house in this direction."

"I believe," said Porthos, "it would be imprudent to

try that manœuvre again. One never succeeds twice, so they say, by the same means. If I fail, all will be lost. I shall get out, seize him just at the moment when he is unsuspecting, and offer him to you already gagged."

"That 's better," said the Gascon.

"Keep ready," said Porthos, gliding out by the opening.

The thing was done as Porthos had promised. The giant hid himself, and when the soldier passed before him, he seized him by the throat, gagged him, pushed him like a mummy through the bars, and entered behind him.

They stripped the second prisoner as they had the other. He was laid on the bed and fastened by the straps, and as the bedstead was of massive oak, and the straps were doubled, they were not less sure of him than of the other.

"There," said D'Artagnan, "that has succeeded capitally. Now try on the dress of that fine fellow. Porthos, I doubt if it will fit you; but, if it is too tight, don't trouble yourself — the shoulder-belt will be sufficient, and especially the hat with red feathers."

They found by chance that the second was a gigantic Swiss, so that, with the exception of some stitches that gave way in the seams, all did very well indeed.

For some time nothing was heard but the rustling of cloth, Porthos and D'Artagnan dressing themselves in haste.

"That 's done," said they both at the same time.

"As for you, companions," they added, turning towards the two soldiers, "nothing will happen if you are quiet; but if you move, you are dead."

They kept quiet. They had comprehended from Porthos's fist that the affair was a most serious one, and that there was no question of joking.

"Now," said D'Artagnan, "you would not be sorry to understand it; is n't that so, Porthos?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Well, we descend into the courtyard."

"Yes."

"We take the place of those jovial fellows."

"Well?"

"We promenade up and down."

"And that will be well to do, as it is not hot."

"And in an instant the *valet de chambre* will call the service, as he did yesterday and the day before."

"We reply?"

"No, we do not reply, on the contrary."

"As you wish; I am not set on replying."

"We do not reply: we only fix our hats firmly on our heads, and we escort his Eminence."

"Where to?"

"Where he is going, — to see Athos; do you think *he* will be sorry to see us?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Porthos, "I understand."

"Be careful not to cry out, Porthos, for you are not yet at the end of your tether," said the Gascon, bantering.

"What is going to happen, then?"

"Follow me. He who lives shall see."

And passing through the opening, he allowed himself to slip gently into the courtyard. Porthos followed in the same fashion, although with somewhat more difficulty. The two soldiers tied up in the room shivered with fear. D'Artagnan and Porthos had scarcely reached the ground when a door opened and the valet's voice was heard, crying, "The service!"

At the same time the door of the guard-room opened, and a voice called out: —

"La Bruyère and Barthois, — march!"

"It appears that I am called La Bruyère," said D'Artagnan.

"And I, Barthois," said Porthos.

"Where are you?" asked the *valet de chambre*, whose eyes, dazzled by the light, could not distinguish our two heroes in the obscurity.

"Here we are," said D'Artagnan.

Then turning towards Porthos,

"What do you say to that, M. du Vallon?"

"Faith, provided that it lasts, I say that it is nice."

The two improvised soldiers marched gravely behind the valet. He opened a door in the hall, then another, which seemed to be that of a waiting-room, and pointing out two stools: "The orders are simple enough," he said to them; "only let one person enter here, — only one, understand clearly, — no more; obey this person in everything. You will wait till I relieve you."

D'Artagnan was very well known to this valet, who was no other than Bernouin, who, during six or eight months, had introduced him a dozen times to the cardinal. Instead of replying he growled the *Ja* with as little Gascon and as much German accent as possible.

As for Porthos, D'Artagnan had asked and obtained from him the promise that he would in no case utter a word. If he was pushed to an extremity it was permitted to him to offer, as his sole reply, *der Teufel*, proverbial and solemn.

Bernouin went away on closing the door.

"Oh, oh!" said Porthos, hearing the key in the lock, "it appears that here it is the fashion to shut up people. We have only, it seems to me, exchanged prisons; instead of being prisoners down there, we are prisoners in the orangery. I don't know if we have gained by it."

"Porthos, my friend," said D'Artagnan in a low voice, "don't doubt Providence, and leave me to meditate and reflect."

"Meditate and reflect then," said Porthos, in a bad humor on seeing things turn out thus instead of turning out otherwise.

"We have marched eighty paces," murmured D'Artagnan; "we have come up six steps; here then is, as my illustrious friend Vallon has said just now, that other pavilion parallel to ours that they call the pavilion of the orangery. The Comte de la Fère ought not to be far off; only the doors are locked."

"That 's a fine difficulty!" said Porthos, "and with a blow of the shoulder —"

"For God's sake, Porthos, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "husband your feats of strength, or they will no longer have, when the time comes, all the value they merit. Have you not heard that some one is coming here?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Well, this some one will open the doors for us."

"But, my dear fellow," said Porthos, "if this some one recognizes us, if this some one begins to cry out, we are lost; for in short, it is not part of your plan, I imagine, to make me knock down or strangle this churchman. These ways are well enough for the English and the Germans."

"Oh, God preserve me from it, and you also!" said D'Artagnan. "The young king would perhaps feel some gratitude to us; but the queen would not pardon us, and it is she whom we must manage; then, besides, needless blood! never! never! I have my plan. Let me carry it out, and we shall have the laugh on our side."

"So much the better," said Porthos; "I feel the need of it."

"Hush!" said D'Artagnan, "here 's the some one spoken of."

There was heard then in the hall the sound of a light step. The hinges of the door creaked, and a man appeared

in cavalier's dress, enveloped in a brown cloak, a large hat pulled down over his eyes, and a lantern in his hand.

Porthos kept back against the wall, but he was not able to prevent himself being seen by the man in the cloak; he handed him his lantern and said to him, "Light the lamp in the hall." Then addressing D'Artagnan: "You know the orders," said he.

"*Ja*," replied the Gascon, determined to confine himself to this specimen of the German language.

"*Tedesco*," said the cavalier, "*va bene*."

And going towards the door fronting that by which he had entered, he opened it and closed it behind him.

"And now," said Porthos, "what shall we do?"

"Now we will make use of your shoulder, if this door is fastened, friend Porthos. Each thing in its time, and everything comes fittingly to him who knows how to wait. But first let us barricade the first door in some suitable fashion; then we will follow this cavalier."

The two friends began their task at once, and blocked up the door with all the furniture which they found in the hall. The door opened inward.

"There," said D'Artagnan, "now we are sure of not being surprised from the rear. Forward!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

M. MAZARIN'S OUBLIETTES.

They reached the door through which Mazarin had disappeared. It was fastened; D'Artagnan tried in vain to open it.

"Now is the time for using your shoulder. Push, but gently, without noise; don't burst anything; disjoin the woodwork, — that's all."

Porthos pressed his sturdy shoulder against one of the panels, which bent, and D'Artagnan then inserted the point of his sword between the bolt and staple of the lock. The bolt, thus bent, gave way, and the door opened.

"Let us go in," said D'Artagnan.

They entered. Behind a glazed partition, by the glimmer of the cardinal's lantern, put on the ground in the middle of the gallery, they saw the orange and pomegranate trees of the château, extending in long lines, forming a grand avenue, and two smaller side ones.

"No cardinal," said D'Artagnan, "only his lamp; where is he then?"

And as he explored one of the side-wings, after having got Porthos to explore the other, he suddenly observed on the left a flower-box moved from its position, and where the box had stood a gaping hole. Ten men would have found it difficult to move this box, but by some mechanical contrivance it had turned with the flag-stone on which it rested. In this hole was a winding staircase. D'Artagnan called Porthos and pointed out to him the hole

and the stairs. The two men looked at each other with a frightened air.

"If we merely wanted gold," said D'Artagnan, in a low voice, "we could become rich forever."

"How so?"

"Don't you understand, Porthos, that at the bottom of this staircase there is, in all probability, the cardinal's famous treasury about which there is so much talk; and that we should have merely to go down, empty a chest, double-lock the cardinal inside, escape after having put the orange-tree in its place, and no one in the world would think of asking us whence our fortune came — not even the cardinal?"

"That would be a fine stroke of business for peasants," said Porthos, "but unworthy, it seems to me, of two gentlemen."

"That 's my opinion. If we wished money merely — but we want something else."

At the same instant, and as D'Artagnan bent his head towards the cave to listen, a hard, metallic sound, like that of a bag of gold being moved, struck his ear; he started. Immediately a door was closed, and the first rays of a light appeared on the staircase. Mazarin had left his lamp in the orangery to make it appear that he was taking a walk. But he had a wax-taper to explore his mysterious strong room.

"Hey!" said he, in Italian, while coming up the stairs, examining a bag of reals with its rounded paunch; "here is somewhat with which to pay five councillors of Parliament and two generals of Paris. I also am a great captain; only I make war in my own fashion —"

D'Artagnan and Porthos were crouching in a side alley, each behind an orange-tree tub and waiting. Mazarin came only a few feet from D'Artagnan, and touched a

spring hidden in the wall. The stone turned, and the orange tree supported by it, returned to its position of itself. Then the cardinal extinguished his taper, which he put back into his pocket, and taking up the lamp, "Let us go and see M. de la Fère," said he.

"Good, it is our road," thought D'Artagnan; "we will go together."

All three moved off, M. de Mazarin keeping the middle of the avenue, and Porthos and D'Artagnan the parallel alleys. The two latter carefully avoided those long lines of light thrown by the cardinal's lantern between the orange-tree boxes. The latter reached a second glass door without perceiving that he was followed, the soft sand deadening the steps of the two who were following him. Then he turned to the left, took a corridor to which Porthos and D'Artagnan had as yet paid no attention; but just when he was about to open the door, he stopped, thoughtful, and, with a movement of impatience, he turned round to go back.

"Ah, *diavolo!*" said he; "I was forgetting Comminges's advice. I must take the soldiers and put them at the door that I may not be at the mercy of this raging devil."

"Do not give yourself the trouble, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, with his foot forward, his hat in hand, and smiling face; "we have followed your Eminence step by step, and here we are."

"Yes, here we are," said Porthos; and he went through the same form of salutation.

Mazarin turned his frightened look from one to the other, recognizing both, and let fall his lantern, uttering a groan of fear.

D'Artagnan picked it up; by good fortune it was not extinguished by the fall.

"Oh, what imprudence, Monseigneur!" said D'Artagnan; "it is not well to walk here without a light! Your Eminence might hit against some box or fall into some hole."

"M. d'Artagnan!" murmured Mazarin, not able to recover from his astonishment.

"Yes, Monseigneur, myself; and I have the honor of presenting to you M. du Vallon, my excellent friend, in whom your Eminence formerly had the goodness to interest yourself so warmly." And D'Artagnan directed the light of the lantern towards Porthos's joyous face, who began to understand how matters stood, and recognized the advantages of the situation.

"You are going to see M. de la Fère," continued D'Artagnan. "Pray don't let us disturb you, Monseigneur. Be good enough to show the road, and we will follow you."

Mazarin recovered his spirits by degrees.

"Have you been a long while in the orangery, Messieurs?" he asked with a trembling voice, thinking of the visit he had just made to his treasure.

Porthos opened his mouth to reply, D'Artagnan made him a sign, and the mouth of Porthos remained mute and closed gradually.

"We came this very moment, Monseigneur."

Mazarin breathed freely; he feared no longer for his treasure, but only for himself. A sort of smile passed across his face.

"Come," said he, "you have taken me in a trap, Messieurs, and I declare myself beaten. You want to ask me for your liberty, do you not? I give it you."

"Oh, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, "you are very good; but we have our liberty, and we should like to ask you for something else."

"You have your liberty?" said Mazarin, frightened.

"Without doubt, and it is you, on the contrary, Monseigneur, who have lost yours; and now what do you expect? — it is the law of war; it is a question of redeeming it."

Mazarin felt a cold shudder pass through him. His piercing look was in vain fixed upon the mocking face of the Gascon, and the impassive face of Porthos. Both were hidden in the shade, and the Cumæan Sibyl herself would not have been able to read them.

"Redeem my liberty!" Mazarin repeated.

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"And how much will that cost me, M. d'Artagnan?"

"Indeed, Monseigneur, I don't know yet. We are going to ask that of the Comte de la Fère, if your Eminence will indeed permit it. Would your Eminence deign then to open the door leading to him, and in ten minutes it will be arranged?"

Mazarin trembled.

"Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, "your Eminence sees how we have hitherto stood upon form, but yet we are obliged to remind you that we have no time to lose. Open then, Monseigneur, if you please, and be good enough to remember, once for all, that at the least movement you make to escape, or the least cry, our position being quite exceptional, you must not blame us if we carry matters to extremities."

"I shall attempt nothing," said Mazarin; "I give you my word of honor."

D'Artagnan made a sign to Porthos to redouble his vigilance. Then turning to Mazarin: "Now, Monseigneur, let us go in, if you please."

CHAPTER XLVII.

CONFERENCES.

Mazarin drew back the bolt of a double door, at the threshold of which Athos was quite ready to receive his illustrious visitor, according to the information given him by Comminges.

On perceiving Mazarin he bowed. "Your Eminence can dispense with any attendance; the honor which I am receiving is too great for me to forget it."

"So, my dear Count," said D'Artagnan, "as his Eminence absolutely did not want us, it is Vallon and myself who have insisted on coming perhaps in an unwelcome manner, so great is our desire to see you." At this voice, with its bantering tone, Athos made a movement of surprise.

"D'Artagnan, Porthos!" he exclaimed.

"In person, dear friend."

"In person," repeated Porthos.

"What does this mean?" asked the count.

"It means," replied Mazarin, trying to smile, and biting his lips in doing so, "that the parts are changed, and that instead of these gentlemen being my prisoners, I am theirs; so much so that you see me forced to receive here the law, instead of giving it. But, gentlemen, I give you notice, unless at least you strangle me, that your victory will be of short duration. I shall have my turn; they will come —"

"Ah, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, "do not threaten; it is a bad example. We are so gentle and so charming with your Eminence. Come, let us put aside all bad humor, let us get rid of all rancor, and let us talk together pleasantly."

"I ask nothing better, Messieurs," said Mazarin, "but at the moment of discussing my ransom, I do not wish that you should think your position better than it is; in taking me in a trap, you are taken in it with me. How will you get out from here? Look at the doors and gates; see or rather imagine the sentinels who keep guard behind them, the soldiers who crowd these courts, and let us come to terms. Come, I want to show you that I am loyal."

"Good!" thought D'Artagnan; "let us hold fast, he is going to play us a trick."

"I was offering you your liberty," continued the minister. "I still offer it to you. Do you wish it? Before an hour you will be discovered, arrested, forced to kill me, which would be a horrible crime, and quite unworthy of loyal gentlemen like you."

"He is right," thought Athos; and like all that was right, which entered that noble soul, his thought was reflected in his eyes.

"So," said D'Artagnan, to correct the hope which the silent adhesion of Athos had given Mazarin, "we resort to that violent act only at the last extremity."

"If on the contrary," continued Mazarin, "you let me go in accepting your liberty —"

"How," interrupted D'Artagnan, "do you wish us to accept our liberty, since you could take it from us again, as you have yourself said, five minutes after giving it? And," added D'Artagnan, "judging from what I know of you, Monseigneur, you would take it from us."

"No, on the word of a cardinal! You do not believe me?"

"Monseigneur, I do not believe cardinals who are not priests."

"Well, on my word as a minister!"

"You are so no longer, Monseigneur, you are a prisoner."

"Then, on the word of Mazarin! I am that, and I shall be always, I hope."

"Hum!" said D'Artagnan, "I have heard of a Mazarin who had little of religious regard for his oaths, and I am afraid that it might be one of the ancestors of your Eminence."

"M. d'Artagnan," said Mazarin, "you have much wit, and I am thoroughly sorry to be at variance with you."

"Monseigneur, let us be reconciled, I ask nothing better."

"Well," said Mazarin, "if I set you free securely, in a manner evident, palpable —"

"Ah, that's another matter," said Porthos.

"Let us see," said Athos.

"Let us see," said D'Artagnan.

"First, do you accept?" asked the cardinal.

"Explain to us your plan, Monseigneur, and we will see."

"Observe well that you are shut up, captured."

"You know well, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, "that there remains to us always a last resource."

"What is it?"

"That of dying together."

Mazarin shuddered.

"Well," said he, "at the end of the corridor is a door of which I have the key; this opens into the park. Take this key and be off. You are alert, strong, and armed. At a hundred yards, on turning to the left, you

will reach the wall of the park; climb over it, and you will be in a few steps on the high road, and free. Now I know you well enough to feel sure that if you are attacked that will be no obstacle to your flight."

"Ah, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, "that 's something like; there is something tangible. Where is that key which you so kindly offer us?"

"Here it is."

"Ah, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, "will you yourself conduct us as far as that door?"

"Very willingly," said the minister, "if that is necessary to put you at ease."

Mazarin, who did not expect to be quit of them so cheaply, went quite cheerfully towards the corridor and unlocked the door. It opened on to the park, and the three fugitives felt the night wind which blew hard into the corridor, and made the snow fly into their faces.

"The devil!" said D'Artagnan, "it 's a horrid night, Monseigneur. We don't know our whereabouts, and shall never find our way. Since your Eminence has done so much in coming so far, a few paces more, Monseigneur — conduct us to the wall."

"So be it," said the cardinal.

And taking a straight line, he went rapidly towards the wall, the foot of which all four reached in a very short time.

"Are you satisfied, Messieurs?" asked Mazarin.

"I believe so; we should be hard to please. *Peste!* what honor! three poor gentlemen escorted by a prince of the church. Ah, by the bye, Monseigneur, you said just now that we were brave, alert, and armed. You are mistaken. Monsieur the Count is not armed, and if we fell in with any patrol, we should have to defend ourselves."

"But where shall we find a sword?" asked Porthos.

"Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, "will lend the count his own as it is useless to him."

"Very willingly," said Mazarin; "I shall even beg Monsieur the Count to keep it in remembrance of me."

"That is very gallant, Count," said D'Artagnan.

"I promise on my part," replied Athos, "never to part with it."

"Very well," said D'Artagnan; "exchange of courtesies, how touching it is! Have you not tears in your eyes, Porthos?"

"Yes," said Porthos, "but I don't know whether it is this or the wind which makes me weep. I think it is the wind."

"Now mount, Athos," said D'Artagnan, "and be quick."

Athos, aided by Porthos, who lifted him up like a feather, reached the top.

"Now jump, Athos."

Athos jumped down and disappeared on the other side of the wall.

"Are you on the ground?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes,"

"Without accident?"

"Perfectly safe and sound."

"Porthos," said D'Artagnan, "watch Monsieur the Cardinal while I am mounting; no, I don't need your help, I can mount by myself. Look after the cardinal, that's all."

"I am doing so," said Porthos. "Well?"

"You are right; it is more difficult than I thought. Lend me your back, but without letting go Monsieur the Cardinal."

"I don't let go of him."

Porthos gave his back to D'Artagnan, who in a moment,

with this support, was astride on the top of the wall. Mazarin pretended to laugh.

"Are you there?" asked Porthos.

"Yes, my friend, and now."

"Now what?"

"Now pass me up Monsieur the Cardinal, and at the least cry he utters, stifle him."

Mazarin wished to cry out, but Porthos took him tightly with his hands and lifted him up to D'Artagnan, who seized him by the collar and seated him near him. Then in a menacing tone, "Monsieur, jump down this very moment near M. de la Fère, or I will kill you, on the word of a gentleman."

"Monsieur, monsieur!" exclaimed Mazarin, "you are not keeping your word."

"I! When did I promise anything, Monseigneur?"

Mazarin gave a groan.

"You are free by my means, Monsieur," said he "Your liberty was to be my ransom."

"Agreed; but is there not need, Monseigneur, to speak a little about the ransom of that immense treasure hidden in the gallery, which is reached by touching a spring hidden in the wall, which turns one of the orange-tree boxes and thus discovers a winding stair?"

"Good God!" said Mazarin, almost suffocated with emotion, and joining his hands together, "I am lost!"

But without being stopped by his laments, D'Artagnan took him below the arms and dropped him gently into Athos's hands, who had remained impassive at the foot of the wall. Then turning towards Porthos, "Take my hand," said D'Artagnan; "I am holding on to the wall."

Porthos made an effort which shook the wall, and so reached the top.

"I did not at all understand matters," said he, "but I do now; it 's very funny."

"Do you find it so? — so much the better. But that it may remain so to the end do not lose time;" and he jumped off the wall. Porthos did the same.

"Accompany Monsieur the Cardinal, Messieurs," said D'Artagnan; "I will reconnoitre."

The Gascon drew his sword, and marched forward in front.

"Monseigneur," said he, "which way must we go to reach the high road? Think well before speaking; for if your Eminence makes a mistake, it would cause great inconvenience not only to us but to you."

"Keep along by the wall, Monsieur," said Mazarin, "and there is no risk of losing yourselves."

The three friends doubled their pace, but in a few moments they were obliged to slacken, as the cardinal could not keep up with them All of a sudden D'Artagnan knocked against something warm, which moved.

"A horse," said he; "I have just come upon a horse, Messieurs."

"So have I!" said Athos.

"And I too!" said Porthos, who, faithful to his orders, kept hold of the cardinal by the arm.

"This is what is called chance, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan. "Just at the moment when your Eminence complained of being obliged to go on foot — "

But just as he was saying this a pistol was aimed at his breast; he heard these words gravely uttered: —

"Don't touch."

"Grimaud!" he cried out, "what are you doing there? Has Heaven sent you?"

"No, Monsieur," said the honest domestic; "it 's M. Aramis, who told me to mind the horses."

"Is Aramis here, then?"

"Yes, Monsieur, since yesterday."

"And what are you doing?"

"We are on the watch."

"What! Aramis here?" repeated Athos.

"At the small gate of the château. That was his post."

"Are there then many of you?"

"Sixty in all."

"Just let him know."

"This instant, Monsieur;" and thinking that no one could execute the order better than himself, Grimaud ran off, while the three friends waited in the hope of being re-united. The only ill-humored one in the whole group was M. de Mazarin.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN WHICH ONE BEGINS TO BELIEVE THAT PORTHOS WILL AT LAST BE MADE A BARON, AND D'ARTAGNAN A CAPTAIN.

In about ten minutes Aramis arrived, accompanied by Grimaud and eight or ten gentlemen. He was quite delighted, and threw himself on his friends' necks.

"You are free then, brothers, free without my help! I have then done nothing in your behalf in spite of all my efforts."

"Do not be distressed, dear friend. What is deferred is not lost. If you have been able to do nothing, you will yet do a good deal."

"Yet I had taken my measures well. I obtained sixty men from Monsieur the Coadjutor; twenty are guarding the park walls, twenty the route from Rueil to St. Germain, and twenty are scattered about in the woods. I have in this way intercepted, thanks to my strategical arrangements, two couriers from Mazarin to the queen."

Mazarin pricked up his ears.

"But," said D'Artagnan, "you have honorably, I hope, sent them back to Monsieur the Cardinal?"

"Ah, yes!" said Aramis, "in dealing with him one would certainly take pride in such delicacy of conduct. In one of these despatches the cardinal declares to the queen that the money chests are empty, and that her Majesty has no more money; in the other he says that he is going to send his prisoners to Melun, Rueil not seeming to him to

be secure enough. You understand, dear friend, that this latter letter gave me much hope. I made an ambuscade with my sixty men, I surrounded the château, and I awaited your coming forth. I scarcely counted on it before to-morrow morning, and I did not expect to set you free without a skirmish. You are free this evening, and without fighting; so much the better. How have you managed to escape from that fellow Mazarin? You must have had much to complain of him."

"Not to any extent," said D'Artagnan.

"Truly!"

"I will say even more, we have had reason to praise him."

"Impossible!"

"Yes, indeed, truly; it is thanks to him that we are free."

"Thanks to him?"

"Yes, he had us taken into the orangery by M. Bernouin, his *valet de chambre;* thence we followed him to the Comte de la Fère's room. Then he offered to give us our liberty; we accepted it, and he pushed his complaisance so far as to show us the way to the wall of the park, which we had just cleared with the greatest delight, when we fell in with Grimaud."

"Ah, well!" said Aramis, "this is something which reconciles me to him; and I wish he were here for me to tell him that I did not think him capable of such a fine action."

"Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, unable any longer to restrain himself, "permit me to present to you Monsieur le Chevalier d'Herblay, who desires to offer, as you may have understood, his respectful felicitations to your Eminence;" and he drew back, unmasking Mazarin, looking very confused, to the bewildered looks of Aramis.

"Oh, oh!" said the latter, "the cardinal! A fine prize. Holloa, holloa! friends! the horses!"

Some cavaliers came hastily up.

"Come, now," said Aramis, "I shall be useful after all. Monseigneur, will your Eminence deign to receive my homage. I bet that it is that Saint Christopher of a Porthos who has made this coup. By the bye, I was forgetting —" and he gave an order in a low tone to a cavalier.

"I believe it would be prudent to set off now," said D'Artagnan.

"Yes, but I am expecting some one — a friend of Athos."

"A friend?" said the count.

"And stop, this is he who is coming at a gallop across the brushwood."

"Monsieur the Count!" cried out a young voice, which made Athos start.

"Raoul! Raoul!" exclaimed the Comte de la Fère.

In a moment the youth forgot his habitual respect, and threw himself on his father's neck.

"You see, Monsieur the Cardinal, what a pity it would have been to separate persons who love one another as we do. Messieurs," continued Aramis, speaking to the cavaliers who were flocking in every moment, "Messieurs, surround his Eminence to do him respect; he intends to accord us the honor of his company, and I hope you will be very grateful to him for it. Porthos, don't lose sight of his Eminence;" and Aramis joined D'Artagnan and Athos in their deliberations.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, after a short conference, "let us be off."

"And where are we going?" Porthos asked.

"To your house, my dear friend, to Pierrefonds; your

fine château is deserving of offering its lordly hospitality to his Eminence. And then it is very well situated, — neither too near, nor too far from Paris; we can from there establish easy communication with Paris. Come, Monseigneur, you will be treated there like a prince, which you are."

"A prince fallen," said Mazarin, piteously.

"War has its chances, Monseigneur," replied Athos, "but be assured we will not abuse them."

"No, but we will use them," said D'Artagnan.

All the rest of the night the capturers travelled with the rapidity of former time; Mazarin, gloomy and thoughtful, allowed himself to be carried off in the midst of this flight of phantoms. By dawn they had gone a dozen leagues at a stretch; one half of the escort was tired out; some horses fell.

"The horses of to-day no longer equal those of former times," said Porthos, "everything degenerates."

"I have sent Grimaud to Dammartin," said Aramis; "he is to bring us five fresh horses, one for his Eminence, four for us. The chief thing is that we must not leave Monseigneur; the rest of the escort will rejoin us later on; when once St. Denis is passed, we have nothing further to fear."

Grimaud in fact brought back five horses; the lord to whom he had addressed himself, being a friend of Porthos, was desirous not to sell them, as was proposed to him, but to offer their use. Ten minutes afterwards the escort stopped at Ermenonville; but the four friends hastened on with fresh ardor, escorting M. de Mazarin. At noon they entered the avenue of Porthos's château.

"Ah," said Mousqueton, who was near D'Artagnan, and who had not spoken a single word during the whole route; "ah! you may believe me or not, Monsieur, but

this is the first time I have drawn a full breath since my departure from Pierrefonds." And he started at a gallop to announce to the other servants the arrival of M. du Vallon and his friends.

"There are four of us," said D'Artagnan to his friends; "we must take turns in guarding Monseigneur, and each will watch three hours. Athos is going to inspect the château, because the point is to make it impregnable in case of siege. Porthos will watch over the provisioning, and Aramis on the admission of a garrison."

Meanwhile Mazarin was installed in the finest apartment of the chateau.

"Messieurs," said he, when the installation was over, "you do not reckon, I presume, on keeping me long here incognito."

"No, Monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan, "quite the contrary; we reckon on making it known as soon as possible that we are holding you."

"Then, they will besiege you."

"We count on that."

"And what will you do?"

"We will defend ourselves. If the late M. le Cardinal de Richelieu was still living, he would relate to you a certain story of a bastion St. Gervais, which we four held, with our four lackeys and twelve dead bodies, against a whole army."

"Those acts of prowess are done once, Monsieur, but are not repeated."

"Therefore to-day we shall have no need of being so heroic; to-morrow the Parisian army will be informed; the day after it will be here. The battle instead of taking place at St. Denis or at Charenton, will be towards Compiègne or Villers-Cotterets."

"Monsieur the Prince will beat you, as he always has."

"That 's possible, Monseigneur; but before the battle we will transfer your Eminence to another château of our friend Vallon; and he has three like this. We don't wish to expose your Eminence to the chances of war."

"Come," said Mazarin, "I see I must capitulate."

"Before the siege?"

"Yes; conditions will perhaps be more reasonable."

"Ah, Monseigneur, as regards conditions, you will see how reasonable we are."

"Come, what are your conditions?"

"Rest yourself first, Monseigneur, and we, — we are going to reflect."

"I have no need of rest, Messieurs, I have need of knowing whether I am in the hands of friends or enemies."

"Friends, Monseigneur, friends."

"Tell me at once then what you desire, that I may see if an arrangement is possible between us. Speak, M. le Comte de la Fère."

"Monseigneur," said Athos, "I have nothing to ask for myself, and I should be obliged to ask too much for France. I therefore decline asking, and pass the word to M. le Chevalier d'Herblay," and Athos, bowing, stepped back, and remained standing as a simple spectator of the conference.

"Speak then, M. le Chevalier d'Herblay," said the cardinal. "What do you ask? No ambiguities. Be clear, short, precise."

"I, Monsiegneur, will play with cards on the table."

"Then lay down your cards."

"I have in my pocket," said Aramis, "the list of the conditions which the deputation, of which I was a member, came the day before yesterday to St. Germain to lay before you. Let us first of all respect ancient rights; the demands which were contained therein are to be granted."

"We were almost agreed upon them," said Mazarin; "let us pass on, therefore, to the special conditions."

"Do you believe that there will be any such?" said Aramis, smiling.

"I don't believe you will all have the same disinterestedness which M. le Comte de la Fère has shown," said Mazarin, turning towards Athos and bowing.

"Ah, Monseigneur, you are right," said Aramis, "and I am glad you are doing justice to the count at last. M. de la Fère has a superior mind, which soars above vulgar desires and human passions; it is a proud soul of older times. Monsieur the Count is a man apart. You are right, Monseigneur, we are not his equals, and we are the first to confess it."

"Aramis," said Athos, "are you jesting?"

"No, my dear count, no; I say what we think, and what all think who know you. But you are right; it is not of you that we are talking, but of Monseigneur and his unworthy servant the Chevalier d'Herblay."

"Well, what do you ask, Monsieur, besides the general conditions, to which we will return presently?"

"I desire, Monseigneur, that Normandy be given to Madame de Longueville, with full and entire absolution, and five hundred thousand francs. I desire that his Majesty, the king, should deign to be godfather to her newly-born son; then that Monseigneur, after having assisted at the baptism, go to Rome to present his homage to our holy Father the Pope."

"That is to say, you wish me to resign my office of minister, and to quit France, and exile myself."

"I wish Monseigneur to become Pope at the first vacancy, reserving to myself the demand of a plenary indulgence for myself and my friends."

Mazarin made an untranslatable grimace.

"And you, Monsieur?" he asked D'Artagnan.

"I, Monseigneur," said the Gascon, "am in accord with M. le Chevalier d'Herblay on all points but the last, and on that I totally differ from him. Far from wishing Monseigneur to leave France, I wish him to remain at Paris; far from wishing him to become Pope, I desire him to remain first minister, for Monseigneur is a great statesman. I will try even, as much as it depends on me, that he shall win the game against the entire Fronde; but on the condition that he bear in mind a little the king's faithful servants, and that he will give the first company of the Musketeers to some one whom I will name. And you, Vallon?"

"Yes, it 's your turn, Monsieur," said Mazarin; "speak."

"I," said Porthos, "wish Monsieur the Cardinal to do honor to my house, which has afforded him an asylum; and in memory of this adventure, to raise my estate into a barony, with a promise of an order for one of my friends for the first promotion which his Majesty shall make."

"You know, Monsieur, that to receive an order, proofs of valor must be furnished."

"This friend will furnish them. Besides, if he absolutely failed in doing this, Monseigneur would tell him how this formality might be avoided."

Mazarin bit his lips.

"All these views agree very badly, it seems to me, Messieurs," he said; "for if I satisfy some, I necessarily dissatisfy the rest. If I stay in Paris I cannot go to Rome and become Pope; if I become Pope I cannot be minister, nor make M. d'Artagnan captain, and M. du Vallon baron."

"That is true," said Aramis; "so, as I am in the minority, I withdraw my proposition respecting the journey to Rome and the resignation of Monseigneur."

"I remain minister, then?" said Mazarin.

"That is understood, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan; "France has need of you."

"And I withdraw my proposals," replied Aramis. "Your Eminence will continue prime minister, and even the favorite of her Majesty, if she will grant to me and my friends what we ask for France and ourselves."

"Trouble only about yourselves, Messieurs, and leave France to settle with me as she will be able to," said Mazarin.

"No, no," replied Aramis, "there must be a treaty with the Frondeurs, and your Eminence will be pleased to draw it up and sign it in our presence, at the same time engaging to obtain for it the queen's ratification."

"I can only answer for myself," said Mazarin. "Suppose her Majesty refuse?"

"Oh," said D'Artagnan, "Monseigneur knows very well that her Majesty refuses him nothing."

"Here, Monseigneur," said Aramis, "this is the treaty proposed by the deputation from the Frondeurs. Will it please your Eminence to examine it?"

"I know it," said Mazarin.

"Then sign it."

"Reflect, Messieurs. A signature given under such circumstances as these would be regarded as obtained by violence."

"Monseigneur, however, will be there to say it was given voluntarily."

"But, in short, if I refuse?"

"Then, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, "your Eminence only is responsible for the consequences of your refusal."

"Would you dare to raise your hands against me, a cardinal?"

"You have raised yours against the Musketeers of his Majesty."

"The queen will avenge me, Messieurs!"

"I know nothing about it, though I don't think she would be wanting in the desire to do so; but we will go to Paris with your Eminence, and the Parisians are the people to defend us."

"How anxious they must be just now at Rueil and St. Germain," said Aramis; "asking what has become of the cardinal, minister, and favorite! How they must be searching for Monseigneur in all places! and if the Fronde knows of the disappearance of Monseigneur, how it must triumph!"

"It is frightful!" murmured Mazarin.

"Sign the treaty, then, Monseigneur," said Aramis.

"But if I sign it and the queen refuse to ratify it?"

"I will undertake to go and see her Majesty," said D'Artagnan, "and obtain her signature."

"Take care," said Mazarin, "that you get the reception at St. Germain which you think you have the right to expect."

"Ah, bah!" said D'Artagnan, "I would arrange it so as to be welcomed; I know a means."

"What?"

"I will take her Majesty the letter in which Monseigneur informs her of the complete exhaustion of the finances."

"Then?" said Mazarin, getting pale.

"Then, when I see her Majesty at the height of her embarrassment, I will take her to Rueil, get her to enter the orangery, and point out to her a certain spring which makes an orange-box move."

"That 's enough, Monsieur, quite enough! Where is the treaty?"

"Here it is," said Aramis, presenting the pen to him.

"You see that we are generous," said D'Artagnan, "for we could do many things with such a secret."

"Sign then," said Aramis.

Mazarin got up, and walked about for a few seconds, rather in thought than as if beaten. Then stopping suddenly, "And when I have signed, Messieurs, what will be my security?"

"My word of honor, Monsieur," said Athos.

Mazarin started, turned towards the Comte de la Fère for a moment, scanned that loyal, noble countenance, and taking the pen, "That's quite sufficient, Monsieur the Count," said he, and he signed.

"And now, M. d'Artagnan," he added, "get ready to set off for St. Germain, and take a letter from me to the queen."

CHAPTER XLIX.

HOW GREATER PROGRESS IS MADE WITH A PEN AND A THREAT THAN BY THE SWORD AND DEVOTEDNESS.

D'ARTAGNAN knew his mythology; he knew that Opportunity has only a tuft of hair by which it can be seized, and he was not the man to let it pass without seizing it. He organized a prompt and sure mode of travelling by sending on in advance relays of horses to Chantilly, so that he could be in Paris in five or six hours. But before setting out he reflected that it was a strange intention, in a man of mind and experience, to leave behind him the certain and go towards the uncertain.

"In fact," he said to himself, when about mounting his horse to fulfil his dangerous mission, "Athos is a hero of romance for generosity; Porthos an excellent character, but easily influenced; Aramis a complete hieroglyphic, that I can never understand. What will these elements produce when I shall be no longer there to bind them together? Perhaps the deliverance of the cardinal. Now, this would be the ruin of our hopes, and these latter are at present the only recompense for the labors of twenty years, compared with which those of Hercules are but pigmy ones;" and he went to find Aramis.

"You are, my dear Chevalier d'Herblay," he said to him, "the Fronde incarnate. Therefore be on your guard against Athos, who does not take the trouble to attend to the affairs of any one, not even his own. But especially

look after Porthos, who to please the count, whom he regards as the Divine Being on earth, will help him to set Mazarin free, if the latter has only the shrewdness to weep or play upon their chivalry."

Aramis smiled at once shrewdly and resolutely.

"Don't fear," said he, "I have my conditions to impose. I am working not for myself, but for others; my small ambition must lead to the advantage of those who have the right to it."

"Good," thought D'Artagnan, "I can be at rest in respect to him."

He shook Aramis's hand and went to find Porthos.

"Friend," he said to him, "you have worked so hard with me to build up our fortune, that just when on the point of reaping the fruit of our labors, it would be a ridiculous proceeding to allow yourself to be overruled by Aramis, with whose shrewdness you are acquainted; or by Athos, a noble, disinterested man, but one tired of the world. What should you say if one or other of our two friends proposed the release of Mazarin?"

"Why, I should say that we have had too much difficulty in taking him to let him go in that way."

"Bravo, Porthos! and you are right, my friend; for with him you would lose all chance of your barony, which you now hold in your hands; without taking into account the fact that if once Mazarin escaped from here, he would have you hanged."

"Good! you believe it?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then I would rather kill him outright than let him escape."

"And you would be right. It is no matter, you understand, that when we have intended to arrange our own affairs, we have also settled those of the Frondeurs, who

besides don't understand political questions as we do, being old soldiers."

"Don't be afraid, dear friend," said Porthos; "I shall first see you off, then I shall return to station myself at the glass door of the cardinal's room, whence I shall see everything, and at the least suspicious movement I will put an end to him."

"Bravo!" thought D'Artagnan, "the cardinal will, I think, be well guarded from this side," and he pressed the hand of the Lord of Pierrefonds, and went off to find Athos.

"My dear Athos," said he, "I am going. I have only one thing to say to you. You know Anne of Austria. M. de Mazarin's captivity is the sole guarantee of my life. If you let him go, I am a dead man."

"Nothing less than this consideration, my dear D'Artagnan, makes me decide to do the business of jailer. I give you my word that you will find the cardinal where you leave him."

"That gives me more reassurance than all royal signatures," thought D'Artagnan. "Now that I have Athos's word I can set out."

D'Artagnan set off quite alone, with no other companion than his sword, and with a simple pass from Mazarin by which to gain admission to the queen.

Six hours after his departure from Pierrefonds, he was at St. Germain.

The disappearance of Mazarin was still unknown; Anne of Austria alone knew of it, and concealed her anxiety from her greatest intimates. There had been found in D'Artagnan's and Porthos's room the two soldiers pinioned and gagged. These were at once set free, but they could tell nothing but what they knew, namely, how they had been caught, bound, and stripped. But what

Porthos and D'Artagnan had done subsequently they knew no more than others in the château.

Bernouin knew a little more than the rest. He, not finding his master return when midnight struck, had taken upon himself to go into the orangery. The first door, barricaded by the furniture, had already raised some suspicions, but he had not desired to let any one share them with him, and had patiently worked his way through all this encumbrance. In the corridor he had found all the doors open, as well as that of Athos's room, and the one opening into the park. When there it was easy to follow the footprints in the snow. These he found led up to the wall, on the other side of which he found the same track, then horses' footmarks, then those of a whole troop of cavalry, which went off in the direction of Enghien. Thereupon he felt not the least doubt that the cardinal had been carried off by the three prisoners, since they had disappeared with him, and he had hastened to St. Germain to apprise the queen of his disappearance.

Anne of Austria had enjoined on him silence, and Bernouin had scrupulously preserved it; only she had informed Monsieur the Prince, to whom she had told all, and he had immediately sent forth five or six hundred cavaliers, with orders to search all the neighborhood, and to bring to St. Germain any suspected troop which might be going from Rueil, no matter in what direction.

Now, as D'Artagnan was not a troop, being alone, and was not escaping from Rueil, since he was going to St. Germain, no one troubled about him, and his journey was in nowise hindered.

On entering the courtyard of the old château, the first person whom our ambassador saw, was M. Bernouin in person, who, standing at the door, was awaiting news of his vanished master.

At the sight of D'Artagnan, who entered on horseback into the courtyard of honor, Bernouin rubbed his eyes, and thought he was mistaken. But D'Artagnan gave him a friendly nod, dismounted and throwing the bridle of his horse upon the arm of a passing lackey, he advanced towards the *valet de chambre*, with a smile upon his lips.

"M. d'Artagnan!" exclaimed the valet, like a man in a nightmare, who speaks in his sleep; "M. d'Artagnan!"

"Himself, M. Bernouin."

"And what have you come to do here?"

"To bring some news from M. de Mazarin, and the latest too."

"And what has become of him?"

"He is as well as you or I."

"No harm then has happened to him?"

"Nothing whatsoever. He has simply felt the need of making a tour in the Ile de France, and has begged M. le Comte de la Fère, M. du Vallon, and myself to accompany him. We were too entirely his servants to refuse such a request. We set out yesterday evening, and here I am."

"Here you are?"

"His Eminence had something he wished said to her Majesty, something quite secret and confidential, which could only be intrusted to a reliable person, so that he has sent me to St. Germain. So then, my dear M. Bernouin, if you wish to do something very pleasing to your master, inform her Majesty of my arrival, and tell her for what object."

Whether he spoke seriously, or whether his words were only spoken in a bantering way, Bernouin knew not, yet it was clear that D'Artagnan was, under present circumstances, the only man who could relieve Anne of Austria's anxiety. Bernouin made no difficulty of going to inform

her of this singular errand, and the queen gave an order for the instant admittance of M. d'Artagnan. He approached his sovereign with all the marks of the profoundest respect. When three yards off he knelt down, and presented the letter.

It was a simple letter, partly of introduction, partly of confidence. The queen read it thoroughly, recognized the cardinal's handwriting, although it was slightly shaky, and as the letter gave no account of what had happened, she demanded the details. D'Artagnan gave them in that ingenuous, simple manner which he could so well assume under certain circumstances.

The queen's astonishment kept increasing as she looked at him while he was speaking. She could not understand a man daring to form such a project, and still less that he should have the audacity to relate it to her, whose interest, and almost whose duty, it was to punish it.

"What, Monsieur," exclaimed the queen, red with indignation, when D'Artagnan had finished his recital, "do you dare to avow your crime, to tell me of your treason?"

"Pardon, Madame, but it seems to me, either I have badly explained myself, or your Majesty has misunderstood me; there is here neither crime nor treason. M. de Mazarin was keeping in prison M. du Vallon and myself, because we could not believe that he had sent us to England quietly to see the execution of King Charles, the brother-in-law of the late king, your husband, the spouse of Madame Henrietta, your sister and your guest; and we had done all we were able to save the life of the royal martyr. We were therefore certain, my friend and myself, that there was some error lying beneath, and that an explanation was needed between us and his Eminence. Now, that an explanation should bear fruit,

it was necessary that it should be made tranquilly, far from the noise of importunate persons. Consequently we conveyed Monsieur the Cardinal to the château of my friend, and there we came to an explanation. Well, Madame, what we had foreseen really happened, — there was a mistake. M. de Mazarin had thought that we had served General Cromwell in place of King Charles, which would have been a shameful act, reflecting from us to him, and from him on your Majesty ; a cowardly act, which would have contaminated, at its source, the royalty of your illustrious son. Now, we have given proof to the contrary, and this proof we are ready to give to your Majesty yourself, by appealing to the august widow who weeps in the Louvre, where your royal munificence has given her an abode. This proof has so well satisfied him, that to mark his satisfaction he has sent me, as your Majesty can see, to talk with you of the amends naturally due to gentlemen so badly appreciated and wrongly persecuted."

"I listen to you with astonishment, Monsieur," said Anne of Austria. "In fact, I have rarely seen a like excess of impudence."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "here is your Majesty, who, in her turn, is deceived as to our intentions, as was M. de Mazarin."

"You are in error, Monsieur," said the queen, "and I am deceived so little, that in ten minutes you shall be arrested, and in an hour I shall set out at the head of my army to deliver my minister."

"I am sure that your Majesty would not do anything so imprudent. Before being delivered Monsieur the Cardinal would be dead, and his Eminence is so well assured of the truth of what I say, that he has, on the contrary, begged me, in case I should see your Majesty inclined to act thus, to do my utmost to get you to change your plans."

"Well, then, I shall content myself with having you arrested."

"Madame, my arrest is as well provided against as is the deliverance of the cardinal. If I do not return to-morrow at an hour agreed on, the next morning Monsieur the Cardinal will be taken to Paris."

"It is evident, Monsieur, that you live far away from men and affairs; for otherwise you would know that Monsieur the Cardinal has been five or six times to Paris, and that he has seen there M. de Beaufort, M. de Bouillon, Monsieur the Coadjutor, M. d'Elbeuf, and not one of them had the idea of arresting him."

"Pardon, Madame, I know all that. It is not to those he then visited that my friends would conduct Monsieur the Cardinal, seeing that these gentlemen make war on their own account, and that on granting what they ask, Monsieur the Cardinal would have the advantage over them; but to the parliament, whom one can bribe doubtless piecemeal, but whom M. de Mazarin himself is not rich enough to buy *en masse*."

"I believe," said Anne of Austria, looking hard at him, a look which was contemptuous in a woman, but which became terrible in a queen; "I think you are threatening your king's mother."

"Madame, I threaten because I am compelled. I raise my tone because it is necessary to place myself upon the level of events and of persons. Madame, as true as that my heart beats for you, believe truly that you have been the one idol of our life; that we have, as you know, risked it twenty times for your Majesty. Madame, will not your Majesty have pity on your servants, who have for twenty years languished in the shade, without allowing one breath of the holy solemn secrets which they have had the honor of sharing with you to escape from

them? Look at me who am now speaking, Madame, whom you accuse of raising my voice and assuming a menacing tone. What am I? — a poor officer without fortune, without future, unless the regard of my queen, for which I have for so long been looking, be fixed for a moment upon me. Regard M. le Comte de la Fère, a type of nobility, a flower of chivalry; he has enlisted against his queen, — or rather he has enlisted against her minister, — and he has nothing to ask, as I believe. See M. du Vallon, that faithful friend, that arm of steel; he has for twenty years been waiting for the word from you which will make him, by his coat of arms, what he is in feeling and courage. Then look at your people who love you and yet suffer; whom you love, and who are yet in want of food; who ask nothing better than to bless you, and who yet — No, I am wrong, your people will never curse you, Madame. Well! say but one word, and all is done, — peace will follow war; joy, tears; happiness, distress."

Anne of Austria looked with a certain astonishment at the martial countenance of D'Artagnan, on which could be read a singular expression of tenderness.

"Why did you not say all this before acting?" said she.

"Because, Madame, the point was to prove to your Majesty one thing of which, it seems to me, you were in doubt, — that we still have some valor, and that it is right that some value should be set on us."

"And this valor will not retreat before anything, from what I see."

"It has not in the past, why should it do less in the future?"

"And this valor in case of a refusal, and still more in case of a struggle, will go to the extent of taking me from

the midst of my court to give me up to the Fronde, as you wish to do with my minister?"

"That never entered our minds, Madame," said D'Artagnan, with that Gascon braggadacio which in him was only frankness; "but if we had resolved upon it, we four, we should certainly do it."

"I ought to know that," muttered Anne of Austria; "they are men of iron."

"Alas! Madame, that proves to me that your Majesty has not had a just idea of us until to-day."

"Well," said Anne, "but this idea, if I have it at last —"

"Your Majesty will do us justice. Doing this, you will no longer treat us as ordinary men. You will see in me an ambassador worthy of the high interests which he is intrusted to discuss with you."

"Where is the treaty?"

"Here it is."

CHAPTER L.

HOW GREATER PROGRESS IS MADE WITH A PEN AND A THREAT, THAN BY THE SWORD AND DEVOTEDNESS (*conclusion*).

ANNE of Austria cast her eyes over the treaty which D'Artagnan presented to her.

"I see in it," said she, "only general conditions. The interests of M. de Conti, M. de Beaufort, M. de Bouillon, M. d'Elbeuf, and Monsieur the Coadjutor, are therein consulted. But yours?"

"We render ourselves justice, Madame, while placing ourselves in our true position. We thought that our names were not worthy to figure among such grand ones."

"But you have not given up the intention, I presume, of stating your pretensions with the living voice?"

"I consider you to be a great and powerful queen, Madame, and that it would be unworthy of your greatness and power, not to worthily recompense the arms which will bring back his Eminence to St. Germain."

"That is my intention; come now, speak."

"He who has negotiated the matter (I beg pardon for beginning with myself, but I must grant to myself the importance, not by any means assumed, but which has been given me) of the cardinal's redemption ought to be appointed head of the Guards, something like captain of the Musketeers."

"That is the post of M. de Tréville."

"The post is vacant, and has been for a year since M. de Tréville resigned."

"But it is one of the chief military posts connected with the king's house."

"M. de Tréville was a simple younger son of a Gascon family, like myself, Madame, and he held the post for twenty years."

"You have an answer for everything, Monsieur."

And she took from her desk a commission, which she filled up and signed.

"In truth, Madame," said D'Artagnan, taking the document with a bow, "this is a fine and noble reward; but this world's affairs are very unstable, and a man who should fall into disgrace with your Majesty might lose this post to-morrow."

"What, then, do you want?" said the queen, blushing at being fathomed by this mind as subtle as her own.

"A hundred thousand francs for this poor captain of the Musketeers, payable on the day when his services shall no longer be agreeable to your Majesty."

Anne hesitated.

"I may say that the Parisians," resumed D'Artagnan, "were offering the other day, by decree of parliament, six hundred thousand francs to any one who would deliver the cardinal dead or alive; living, to hang him; dead, to bury him on the highway."

"Well, it is reasonable, since you ask the queen for only the sixth part of what the parliament offered." And she signed a promise for a hundred thousand francs.

"Next?" said she.

"Madame, my friend Vallon is rich, and has no desire for fortune; but I believe there was a question between him and M. de Mazarin, of raising his estate into

a barony. It is even, so far as I can remember the matter, a thing promised."

"A country fellow! They will laugh about it."

"It may be, but I am sure of one thing, that those who laugh in his presence will not laugh a second time."

"Let him have the barony," said Anne of Austria, and she signed.

"Now, there remains the Chevalier, or l'Abbé d'Herblay, as your Majesty may prefer."

"He wants to be a bishop?"

"Not at all, Madame, he wants something more easily given."

"What is that?"

"That the king should deign to be godfather to Madame de Longueville's son."

The queen smiled.

"M. de Longueville is of royal descent, Madame."

"Yes," said the queen; "but her son?"

"Her son, Madame — ought to be, since the husband of his mother is."

"And your friend has nothing more to ask for Madame de Longueville?"

"No, Madame; for he presumes, that his Majesty the king, deigning to be the child's godfather, cannot make to the mother for the churching as a present less than five hundred thousand francs, continuing, be it understood, the government of Normandy to the father."

"As to the latter, I think I can engage myself," said the queen; "but as regards the five hundred thousand francs, Monsieur the cardinal does not cease repeating to me that there is no more money in the State coffers."

"We will search for it together, Madame, if your Majesty will permit, and we shall find some."

"Next?"

"That is all."

"Have you not a fourth companion?"

"Indeed, yes, Madame; M. le Comte de la Fère."

"What does he ask?"

"He asks for nothing."

"Is there in the world a man, who, being able to ask, does not ask?"

"There is M. le Comte de la Fère, Madame; he is not a man."

"What is he then?"

"M. le Comte de la Fère is a demigod."

"Has he not a son, a young man, a relative or nephew, of whom Comminges has spoken to me as a brave fellow, and who brought the colors from Lens with M. de Châtillon?"

"He has, as your Majesty says, a ward, whose name is the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"If a regiment were given this young man, what would his guardian say?"

"Perhaps he would accept it."

"Perhaps!"

"Yes, if your Majesty herself begged him to accept it."

"You have truly said, Monsieur, that this is a singular man. Well, we will think it over, and ask him perhaps. Are you satisfied, Monsieur?"

"Yes, your Majesty. But there is one thing the queen has not signed."

"What?"

"And this thing is the most important."

"My acquiescence to the treaty?"

"Yes."

"What is the good? I will sign the treaty to-morrow."

"There is one thing that I think I can state to your Majesty; namely, that if your Majesty does not sign this

document to-day, you will not find the time to sign it later on. Be pleased, then, I beg of you, to write at the foot of this programme, which is entirely in M. de Mazarin's handwriting, as you see, 'I consent to ratify the treaty proposed by the Parisians.'"

Anne was caught; she could not retreat; she signed. But she had scarcely done so before her pride broke forth like a tempest, and she began to weep. D'Artagnan started at the sight of these tears. Since that time queens have wept like simple women. The Gascon shook his head. These royal tears seemed to scorch his heart.

"Madame," said he, kneeling down, "look at this unfortunate gentleman who is at your feet; he prays of you to believe that at a single gesture from your Majesty everything would be possible to him. He has faith in himself, he has faith in his friends, he wishes also to have faith in his queen; and the proof that he fears nothing, that he speculates on nothing, is that he will bring back Mazarin to your Majesty without any conditions. Here, Madame, are your Majesty's sacred signatures; if you believe you ought to give me them you will do it. But from this moment they do not bind you any longer."

And D'Artagnan, still on his knees, with a flaming look of pride and manly boldness, returned to Anne of Austria the whole of the papers which he had obtained one by one with so much trouble.

There are moments — for if all is not good, all is not bad in this world — there are moments, when in the driest and coldest hearts there springs up, watered by the tears of extreme emotion, a generous feeling, which calculation and pride smother, if another feeling does not seize it at its birth. Anne was in one of those moments. D'Artagnan, in yielding to his own emotion, in harmony with that of the queen, had accomplished a great diplomatic

feat. He was therefore immediately recompensed for his address, or disinterestedness, according as one would wish to do honor to his wit or to his heart for the motive of this action.

"You were right, Monsieur," said Anne; "I have not understood you. Here are these signed documents which I voluntarily return you; go and bring me the cardinal as quickly as possible."

"Madame," said D'Artagnan, "twenty years ago — for I have a good memory — I had the honor of kissing one of those beautiful hands behind a tapestry of the Hôtel de Ville."

"Here is the other," said the queen; "and that the left may not be less liberal than the right" — she drew from her finger a diamond ring very much like the former — "take and keep this in memory of me."

"Madame," said D'Artagnan, getting up, "I have only one other desire, which is, that the first thing you ask of me may be my life;" and with that manner which was quite characteristic of him, he rose and went out.

"I have misunderstood those men," said Anne of Austria, while looking at D'Artagnan as he withdrew, "and it is now too late for me to make use of them; in one year the king will be of age."

Fifteen hours after, D'Artagnan and Porthos brought back Mazarin to the queen, and received, the one his commission of lieutenant-captain of the Musketeers, the other his title of baron.

D'Artagnan bowed. Porthos kept turning over his diploma in his hands, while looking at Mazarin.

"What is there besides?" asked the minister.

"It is, Monseigneur, that there was a promise of the title of Chevalier of the Order at the first promotion."

"But," said Mazarin, "you know, Monsieur the Baron, that one cannot be Chevalier of the Order without proofs of valor."

"Oh!" said Porthos, "it is not for myself, Monseigneur, for whom I ask the blue ribbon."

"For whom, then?" asked Mazarin.

"For my friend, M. le Comte de la Fere."

"Oh, for him!" said the queen, "that alters the case; he has given sufficient proofs."

"He shall have it?"

"He has it."

The same day the treaty of Paris was signed, and it was published abroad that the cardinal had been privately engaged for three days in most carefully elaborating it.

Here is what each gained by this treaty: M. de Conti had Damvilliers, and having proved his ability as general, he gained the privilege of remaining an officer and of not becoming a cardinal. Further, some words had been dropped of a marriage with a niece of Mazarin; these words had been received with favor by the Prince, to whom it mattered little with whom they should marry him, provided they married him.

The Duc de Beaufort returned to court, reparation being made for all the injuries done to him. Full pardon was accorded to those who had aided him in his escape, the survival of the admiralship held by the Duc de Vendôme, his father, and an indemnity for his houses and châteaus caused to be burned by the parliament of Brittany.

The Duc de Bouillon received domains of an equal value to his principality of Sedan, an indemnity for the eight years of non-enjoyment of that principality, and the title of Prince granted to him and his house.

M. le Duc de Longueville, the government of Pont-de-l'Arche, five hundred thousand francs for his wife, and the

honor of seeing his son held at the baptismal font by the young king and the young Henrietta of England.

The Duc d'Elbeuf obtained the payment of certain sums due to his wife, one hundred thousand francs for the oldest son, and twenty-five thousand for each of the three others.

There was only the Coadjutor who obtained nothing. It was promised to hold negotiations with the Pope for a cardinal's hat; but he knew what dependence could be placed on such promises, coming from the queen and Mazarin. Quite to the contrary of M. de Conti's case, he was compelled to remain a military man.

So, while all Paris was rejoicing at the approaching king's entry, Gondy alone, in the midst of the general joy, was in such bad humor, that he sent at once for two men, whom he had the practice of sending for, when in this frame of mind.

These two men were the Comte de Rochefort and the mendicant of St. Eustache. They came with their usual punctuality, and the Coadjutor passed a part of the night with them.

CHAPTER LI.

WHERE IT IS SHOWN THAT IT IS SOMETIMES MORE DIFFICULT FOR KINGS TO RETURN TO THEIR CAPITAL THAN TO LEAVE IT.

WHILE D'Artagnan and Porthos were gone to conduct the cardinal to St. Germain, Athos and Aramis, who had left them at St. Denis, had reached Paris. Each of them had a visit to make.

In all haste Aramis went to the Hôtel de Ville, where Madame de Longueville was residing. At the first news of the peace the beautiful duchess uttered indignant cries. War made her queen, peace brought her abdication; she declared she would never sign the treaty, and that she wished eternal war. But when Aramis presented the peace in its true colors, — that is, with all its advantages; when he pointed out the gain of the vice-royalty of Pont-de-l'Arche, that is, of the whole of Normandy, in exchange for the precarious government of Paris; when he made the five hundred thousand francs promised by the cardinal to resound in her ears; when he made the honor which would be done her, by the king holding her son at the baptismal font, glitter before her eyes, she no longer contended except from the practice which all beautiful women have of contesting, and only defended for the purpose of surrendering.

Aramis pretended to believe in the reality of her opposition, and did not wish to take away the merit in his own eyes of having won her over.

"Madame," he said to her, "you had a strong desire to maintain a good fight against Monsieur the Prince, your brother, who is the greatest general of the time; and when women of genius wish to do so they always succeed. You have succeeded; Monsieur the Prince is beaten, since he can no longer wage war. Now, win him over to your side. Separate him in a gentle manner from the queen, whom he does not like, and from M. de Mazarin whom he detests. The Fronde is a comedy of which we have played as yet only the first act. Let us leave M. de Mazarin alone until the catastrophe; that is the day when Monsieur the Prince, thanks to you, will be at variance with the court."

Madame de Longueville was persuaded. She was so fully convinced of the power of her beautiful eyes, this Duchess of the Fronde, that she did not doubt their influence, even over M. de Condé; and the scandalous chronicles of the time say that she did not presume too far.

Athos, on leaving Aramis at the Place Royale, had gone to visit Madame de Chevreuse. This was another of the Fronde party to be won over, but this was more difficult than in the case of her young rival; no condition had been set down in the treaty in her favor. M. de Chevreuse was not nominated to any government; and if the queen agreed to be godmother it could be only to a grandchild. So, at the first mention of peace, Madame de Chevreuse frowned, and in spite of all Athos's logic to prove to her that a continuation of war was impossible, she insisted on a continuance of hostilities.

"Dear friend," said Athos, "permit me to tell you that everybody is tired of war; and with the exception of yourself and Monsieur the Coadjutor, perhaps, everybody desires peace. You will get yourself exiled, as in the time

of King Louis XIII. Believe me, we have passed the period of successful intrigue; and your beautiful eyes are not destined to lose their brilliancy in bewailing Paris, where there will always be two queens so long as you are here."

"Oh!" said the duchess, "I cannot make war all alone, but I can be avenged on this ungrateful queen and her ambitious favorite, and — on the word of a duchess, I will be avenged."

"Madame," said Athos, "I beg of you not to mar M. de Bragelonne's future; you see him launched forth; Monsieur the Prince desires his advancement, — he is young. Let us leave a young king to become established. Alas! excuse my weakness, Madame; there comes a moment when a man lives and grows young again in his children."

The duchess smiled, half-tenderly, half-ironically.

"Count, you are, I am much afraid, won over to the court. Have you not a blue ribbon in your pocket?"

"Yes, Madame, that of the Garter, which King Charles I. gave me a few days before his death."

The count spoke the truth; he knew nothing of Porthos's request.

"Come! one must become an old woman," said the duchess, pensively.

Athos took her hand and kissed it. She sighed, looking at him.

"Count," said she, "that Bragelonne ought to be a charming residence. You are a man of taste; you must have there water, woods, flowers."

She sighed again, and rested her charming head upon her hand, coquettishly curved, and always admirable in form and whiteness.

"Madame," replied the count, "what were you saying

then just now? I have never seen you so young, never more beautiful."

The duchess shook her head.

"M. de Bragelonne, does he remain in Paris?" said she.

"What do you think of it?" asked Athos.

"Leave him to me," replied the duchess.

"No, Madame; if you have forgotten the story of Œdipus, I remember it."

"Truly, you are charming, Count, and I should like to live a month at Bragelonne."

"Have you no fear of making many envious of me, Duchess?" replied Athos, gallantly.

"No, I would go incognito, Count, under the name of Marie Michon."

"You are adorable, Madame."

"But Raoul, don't keep him with you."

"Why not?"

"Because he is in love."

"He, a child!"

"It is also a child whom he loves."

Athos became thoughtful.

"You are right, Duchess, this singular love for a child of seven years may render him one day very unhappy; they are going to fight in Flanders, he shall go."

"Then at his return you will send him to me; I will cuirass him against love."

"Alas! Madame," said Athos, "to-day love is like war, and the cuirass has become useless in it."

At that moment Raoul entered. He came to inform them that the Comte de Guiche, his friend, had told him that the ceremonial entry of the king, queen, and minister would take place the next day. Indeed, from early dawn the court was making preparations for leaving

St. Germain. The queen had, over night, sent for D'Artagnan.

"Monsieur," she had said to him, "they tell me that Paris is not quiet. I am afraid for the king. Place yourself at the right-hand door of the carriage."

"Let your Majesty's mind be at rest; I will answer for the king."

And, bowing to the queen, he went out. As he was leaving, Bernouin came to tell D'Artagnan that the cardinal awaited him on important matters. He went immediately to see the cardinal.

"Monsieur," Mazarin said to him, "there is talk of a riot in Paris. I shall be on the king's left, and as I shall be chiefly threatened, place yourself at the left-hand door."

"Your Eminence may feel quite at your ease," said D'Artagnan; "not a hair of your head shall be injured. — The devil!" he ejaculated, when once in the ante-room, "how am I to get out of this? I cannot at the same time be at both sides of the carriage. Ah, bah! I will guard the king, and Porthos the cardinal."

This arrangement satisfied every one, — an unusual occurrence. The queen had confidence in D'Artagnan's courage, which she had tried; and the cardinal in Porthos's strength, which he had felt.

The *cortège* set out for Paris in an order settled beforehand. Guitaut and Comminges at the head of the Guards went first; then came the royal carriage, having D'Artagnan and Porthos at the doors; then the Musketeers, for the last twenty-two years friends of D'Artagnan, who had been their lieutenant for twenty years, their captain since the evening before.

On reaching the barrier, the carriage was welcomed by loud cries of "Vive le Roi!" and "Vive la Reine!" A few cries of "Vive Mazarin!" were interspersed, but they

met with no response. They were going to Notre-Dame where a Te Deum was to be chanted.

All Paris was in the streets. The Swiss Guards had been marshalled along the route ; but as the distance was considerable, they were stationed from six to eight feet apart, and only one deep. The protection was therefore utterly insufficient, and from time to time, the barrier being broken through by a crush of people, they had the greatest difficulty possible in re-forming.

At each breach of the line, from quite friendly intentions, since it showed the desire the Parisians had to see their king and queen, of whose presence they had been deprived a whole year, Anne of Austria looked at D'Artagnan with anxiety, and the latter re-assured her by a smile.

Mazarin, who had expended a thousand louis for the cries of " Vive Mazarin," and who had estimated the cries he had heard as not worth twenty pistoles, also looked at Porthos anxiously ; but the gigantic body-guard answered the look in his deep bass, " All right, Monseigneur ! " and Mazarin felt more and more at his ease.

On reaching the Palais-Royal, the crowd was still thicker; it had flowed towards this space from all the adjacent streets, and like a swelling stream, this wave of people came before the carriage, and rolled tumultuously in the Rue St. Honoré.

When they came to the place, loud cries were heard of " Long live their Majesties ! " Mazarin leaned towards the door. Two or three cries of " Vive le Cardinal ! " saluted his appearance, but almost immediately hisses and hootings pitilessly drowned them. Mazarin turned pale, and leaned back in the carriage.

" Rabble ! " muttered Porthos.

D'Artagnan said nothing, but twisted his mustache with

a peculiar gesture, which showed that his fine Gascon good temper was beginning to change. Anne of Austria whispered low into the young king's ear, "Make a gracious salutation, and address some words to M. d'Artagnan, my son."

The young king leaned forward at the door. "I have not yet wished you good day, M. d'Artagnan," said he, "and yet I knew you again well enough. You it was who was behind my bed-curtains, on the night when the Parisians wished to see me asleep."

"And if the king permit me, I shall always be near him when there is any danger to be faced."

"Monsieur," said Mazarin to Porthos, "what would you do if all this crowd fell upon us?"

"I should kill as many as I could of them, Monseigneur."

"Hm!" said Mazarin; "although you are brave and strong, you could not kill them all."

"That is true," said Porthos, rising up in his stirrups the better to learn the immensity of the crowd; "that 's true; there are many of them."

"I think I should have preferred the other," said Mazarin, and he threw himself back in the carriage.

The queen and her minister had reason for feeling some disquietude, — especially the latter. The crowd, while preserving the appearance of respect and even of affection for the king and the regent, began to be tumultuously agitated. One heard dull rumors floating about, which, when arising from the waves, indicate a tempest, and which, when they skim along the multitude, presage an outbreak.

D'Artagnan turned towards the Musketeers, and with a look, not observable by the crowd, but readily understood by this brave *corps*, he gave an order. The rank of

horses closed together, and a slight agitation took place among the men. At the barrier of the sergeants a halt had to be made; Comminges left the head of the escort, and came to the queen's carriage. The queen interrogated D'Artagnan with a look; he answered in a similar way.

"Go forward!" said the queen.

Comminges went back to his post. With an effort the living barrier was violently broken through. Some mutterings arose in the crowd, which were this time addressed to the king as much as to the minister.

"Forward!" cried D'Artagnan aloud.

"Forward!" repeated Porthos.

But, as if the crowd had awaited this demonstration to break out, all the hostile feelings hitherto restrained, broke forth at once. The cries, "Down with Mazarin! Death to the cardinal!" arose from all sides.

At the same time, by the Rues de Grenelle St. Honoré and Du Coq, a double wave came pressing in, which broke the feeble line of Swiss Guards, and began to eddy even to the horses' legs. This fresh irruption was more dangerous than the others, as it was composed of armed men, and better armed too than the populace are on such occasions. It was clear that this last movement was the combination of some hostile leader, who had organized an attack.

These two masses were each led by a chief, one of whom seemed to belong to the honorable association of mendicants; the other could be easily recognized as being a gentleman. Both of them were acting as if on a plan previously concerted. There was a sharp shock, which was felt even in the royal carriage; then thousands of cries, making a huge din, arose, interspersed by two or three shots being fired.

"Musketeers, to the rescue!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

The escort formed in two files; one passed to the right of the coach, the other to the left, thus aiding both D'Artagnan and Porthos.

Then a *mêlée* took place, all the more terrible because it had no object; all the more fatal because it could not be seen why nor for whom the fighting was going on.

CHAPTER LII.

WHERE IT IS SHOWN THAT IT IS SOMETIMES MORE DIFFICULT FOR KINGS TO RETURN TO THEIR CAPITAL THAN TO LEAVE IT (*conclusion*).

Like all the movements of a crowd, the shock was terrific; the Musketeers, few in number, thrown out of line, and unable in the midst of this multitude to make their horses move forward, began to be broken through. D'Artagnan had wished to have the carriage blinds closed, but the young king had stretched out his hand, saying, "No, M. d'Artagnan, I wish to see."

"If your Majesty wishes to see, well, let him look!" and turning round with that fury which made him so terrible, D'Artagnan dashed at the chief of the rioters, who, with pistol in one hand and sword in the other, tried to force a passage to the door while struggling with two musketeers.

"Back!" cried D'Artagnan, "back!"

On hearing this, the man armed with pistol and sword raised his head; but he was already too late, — D'Artagnan had given the fatal stroke; his sword had transfixed him.

"Ah, confound it!" cried D'Artagnan, trying too late to recall the stroke, "what the devil did you come here for, Count?"

"To fulfil my destiny," said Rochefort, falling on one knee. "I have already recovered from three of your sword-thrusts, but I shall not from the fourth."

"Count," said D'Artagnan, with sincere emotion, "I

struck without knowing who it was. I hope you will not die with any feelings of hatred towards me."

Rochefort gave D'Artagnan his hand, which he took. The count tried to speak, but an effusion of blood stopped his words; he grew rigid with the last convulsion, and expired.

"Off with you, mob!" cried D'Artagnan. "Your leader is dead, and you have nothing more to do here."

In fact, as though the Comte de Rochefort had been the soul of the attack, the crowd, which had followed and obeyed him, took to flight on seeing him fall. D'Artagnan charged with twenty musketeers up the Rue du Coq, and this part of the rioting mob disappeared like smoke, dispersing on the Place de St. Germain-l'Auxerrois, and going towards the quays.

D'Artagnan returned to give help to Porthos if he needed it; but Porthos had on his part done his work as conscientiously as the former. The left side of the carriage was also cleared, and the blind of the door which Mazarin, less warlike than the king, had taken the precaution to let down, was now raised.

Porthos had a very melancholy look.

"What a devil of a look you have got, Porthos! What a strange appearance for one victorious."

"But you yourself," said Porthos, "seem to me to be agitated."

"I have reason to be. I have just killed an old friend."

"Truly?" said Porthos. "Who may it be?"

"That poor Comte de Rochefort?"

"Well, that's exactly what I did. I have just killed a man whose face is not unknown to me; unfortunately I struck him on the head, and in an instant he had his face covered with blood."

"And did he say nothing when he dropped?"

"Oh, yes, he said 'Ouf'!"

"I quite see," said D'Artagnan, unable to keep from laughing, "that if he said nothing else, that could not enlighten you much."

"Well, Monsieur?" the queen asked.

"Madame," said D'Artagnan, "the route is quite clear, and your Majesty can continue your course."

In fact the *cortège* reached Notre-Dame without other accident, under the porch of which all the clergy, the Coadjutor at their head, awaited the king, queen, and minister, for whose happy return a Te Deum was to be sung.

Towards the end of the service a street boy, looking scared, entered the cathedral, ran to the sacristy, put on his dress of choir boy, and making his way, thanks to the respected vestments which he assumed, through the crowd, he approached Bazin, who, clothed in his blue robe, and his staff ornamented with silver in his hand, held his place gravely in front of the Swiss at the entrance of the choir.

Bazin felt himself pulled by the sleeve. He lowered his eyes, previously raised heavenwards, and recognized Friquet.

"Well, stupid, what is the matter that you dare to disturb me in the exercise of my functions?" asked the beadle.

"The matter is, Bazin, that M. Maillard, — you know him, the distributor of the holy water at St. Eustache —"

"Yes, go on."

"Well, he has received in the row a sword-cut in the head; it was that great giant who was there who gave it him."

"In that case," said Bazin, "he must be very bad."

"So bad that he is dying, and he wishes before he dies

to confess to Monsieur the Coadjutor, who has power, so they say, to remit great sins."

"And he supposes that Monsieur the Coadjutor will put himself out of the way for him?"

"Yes, certainly, for it seems that Monsieur the Coadjutor has promised him to do so."

"And who told you so!"

"M. Maillard himself."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Certainly; I was there when he fell."

"And what were you doing there?"

"I kept crying, 'Down with Mazarin! Death to the cardinal! To the gallows with the Italian!' Is not that what you have told me to cry out?"

"Hold your tongue, young stupid!" said Bazin, looking anxiously around him.

"So he told me, this poor M. Maillard! 'Go and fetch Monsieur the Coadjutor, Friquet; and if you bring him to me I will make you my heir.' Fancy now, Father Bazin, the heir of M. Maillard, the holy water giver of St. Eustache! Hey, I shall have only to fold my arms! I should like to do him this service. What do you say?"

"I will go and tell Monsieur the Coadjutor," said Bazin.

In fact, he slowly and respectfully approached the prelate, said something in his ear, to which the latter replied by an affirmative nod, and returning at the same pace he bade Friquet, "Go and tell the dying man to have patience; Monseigneur will be with him in an hour."

"Good," said Friquet; "now my fortune is made."

"By the bye," said Bazin, "where was he carried?"

"To the tower of St. Jacques la Boucherie."

And enchanted with the success of his embassy, Friquet, without taking off his choir dress, which gave him greater

liberty of passing to and fro, went from the church, and with all the speed of which he was capable, took the route to St. Jacques la Boucherie.

In fact, as soon as the Te Deum was over, the Coadjutor, as he had promised, and without even putting off his sacerdotal dress, took his way towards the old tower which he knew so well. He reached there in time. Although getting fainter and fainter, the wounded man was not yet dead. They opened the door of the room where the mendicant lay in the agonies of death. A moment after, Friquet came out holding in his hand a large leather bag, which he opened as soon as he was out of the room, and which to his great astonishment he found full of gold. The mendicant had kept his word, and had made him his heir.

"Ah, Mother Nanette," exclaimed Friquet, choking; "ah, Mother Nanette!"

He could not say more; but the strength which failed him for speaking remained for acting. He took a desperate jump towards the street; and like the Greek from Marathon falling down in the market-place of Athens with the laurel in his hand, so Friquet reached the door-step of Councillor Broussel, and fell when he got there, scattering on the floor the louis which were disgorged from his bag.

Mother Nanette began by picking up the louis, and then picked up Friquet.

During this time the *cortège* returned to the Palais-Royal.

"That M. d'Artagnan is a very valiant man, Mother," said the young king.

"Yes, my son, and one who did very great services for your father. Treat him with consideration for the future."

"Monsieur the Captain," said the king to D'Artagnan, while alighting from his carriage, "Madame the Queen desires me to invite you to dinner to-day, you and your friend, the Baron du Vallon."

It was a great honor for D'Artagnan and Porthos, and accordingly the latter was transported with joy. Nevertheless, during the whole of the repast the worthy gentleman seemed quite preoccupied.

"Why, what was the matter with you, Baron?" said D'Artagnan to him when going down the Palais-Royal staircase; "you had quite an anxious air during dinner."

"I was trying," said Porthos, "to recall where I had seen that mendicant whom I must have killed."

"And you could not succeed?"

"No."

"Well, try and find out, my friend; and when you have, you will tell me, will you not?"

"Yes, of course!" said Porthos.

CONCLUSION.

On returning to their hôtel the two friends found a letter from Athos, appointing a meeting at the Charlemagne Hôtel for the morning of the next day.

Both went to bed early, but neither could sleep. They had not gained the object of their wishes without the effect being to drive away sleep at least for the first night.

Accordingly, the next morning at the hour named they called on Athos. They found him and Aramis in travelling dress.

"Well," said Porthos, "we are all then about to part. I have also made my preparations this morning."

"Oh, yes," said Aramis, "there is nothing more to be done in Paris now that there is no Fronde. Madame de Longueville has invited me to go and spend a few days in Normandy, and has commissioned me, while her child's baptism takes place, to go and secure lodgings for her in Rouen. I am going for this purpose; then, if there is nothing new, I shall return and bury myself in my convent at Noisy-le-Sec."

"I," said Athos, "shall return to Bragelonne. You know, my dear D'Artagnan, that I am nothing more than a simple country gentleman. Raoul has no other fortune than mine, poor child, and I must watch over it, since I am in some sort only a life trustee."

"And what shall you do with Raoul?"

"I shall leave him with you, my friend. There is going to be a campaign in Flanders; you will take him with you; I am afraid that his stay at Blois is only dangerous to him. Take him with you, and teach him to be brave and upright like yourself."

"And I," said D'Artagnan, "though I shall no longer have you, shall at least have him, the dear fair face; and although he is but a youth, as your soul lives entirely again in him, dear Athos, I shall always believe you to be near me, accompanying and sustaining me."

The four friends embraced with tears in their eyes. Then they separated, without knowing whether they should ever meet again.

D'Artagnan returned to Rue Tiquetonne with Porthos, who was continually pondering and trying to discover who the man was whom he had killed.

On reaching the Hôtel de la Chevrette they found the baron's equipage ready, and Mousqueton in the saddle.

"I say, D'Artagnan," said Porthos, "leave the sword and come with me to Pierrefonds, or Bracieux, or Le Vallon; we will grow old together in talking of our companions."

"No, no," said D'Artagnan. "Hang it! the campaign is beginning, and I want to be in it; I hope to win something."

"And what do you hope to become then?"

"Marshal of France, by Jove!"

"Ah, ah!" said Porthos, looking at D'Artagnan, whose Gasconnades he had never been able to understand entirely.

"Come with me, Porthos; I will make you a duke."

"No," said Porthos. "Mouston has no longer a liking for war. Besides, they have arranged a triumphal entry at my place, which will make all my neighbors die of envy."

"To that I have nothing to answer," said D'Artagnan, who knew the vanity of the new baron. "*Au revoir*, then, my friend."

"*Au revoir*, dear captain," said Porthos. "You know that when you would like to come and see me you will always be welcome in my barony."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "on my return from the campaign I will come."

"The equipage of Monsieur the Baron awaits him," said Mousqueton, and the two friends separated after shaking hands.

D'Artagnan stood on the doorstep, following Porthos with melancholy look as he went away. But at the end of a few yards Porthos stopped short, hit his forehead, and returned.

"I recollect," said he.

"What?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Who that mendicant was that I killed."

"Ah, really! who is it?"

"Why, that rascal Bonacieux;" and Porthos, delighted with thus relieving his mind, rejoined Mousqueton, and soon disappeared round the corner of the street.

D'Artagnan remained for a moment immovable and pensive; then turning round, he saw the fair Madeleine, who, perplexed at the new grandeur of D'Artagnan, was standing at the door.

"Madeleine," said the Gascon, "give me the apartment on the first floor; I am obliged to keep up my dignity now that I am captain of the Musketeers. But always keep my room on the fifth floor; one never knows what may happen."

THE END.